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PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

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PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

IN THE
LONDON BUILDING TRADES

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LONDON
J. M. DENT & COMPANY
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INTRODUCTION

THE following essay is the outcome of a personal investigation undertaken for the Toynbee Trustees by my friend, and former pupil, Mr. Dearle. I have read with much appreciation his careful study of unemployment in connection with the London building trade; and it has been a pleasant and an honourable duty to comply with his request that I should write this introduction. Mr. Dearle has, I think, been singularly happy in his choice of a subject. For he has addressed himself to the consideration of a question of which it would be difficult to deny the immediate interest or to doubt the continuing importance. The problem or, as he states more correctly, the problems of unemployment are now engrossing a large share of popular attention in this country; and few expert observers of the trend of industrial life among Western nations would assert that hitherto they have secured more notice than they are destined to receive. An endeavour was made recently by the British Parliament to devise, as a temporary expedient, appropriate machinery for the harmless but effective treatment of urgent crises originating from this source; and the Report of the Poor Law Commission has been eagerly awaited in the hope or ex-

pectation that it would contain proposals of a permanent nature and a comprehensive scope for the definitive and satisfactory legislative or administrative handling of these prominent perplexing questions.

In various quarters the feeling has been expressed, or entertained, that in some respects, at any rate, the present situation differs from any that entered actively into the thoughts or policy of legislators or administrators seventy or eighty years ago when the Act for the Amendment of the Poor Law was introduced, discussed, and passed; and the conclusion has been drawn that fresh or enlarged conceptions of the position of affairs, and new or developed plans of action, whether within or without the purview of the Poor Law, are now both possible and requisite. In this essay Mr. Dearle points out with reference to the particular trade, or group of trades, he has examined, that certain notable changes, exercising an indisputable if not immediate influence on the likelihood and the extent of unemployment, have occurred in a comparatively recent time. Or at any rate, after developing slowly, and it may be unperceived, during many years, "within the last few" they have, it is obvious, "greatly increased in impetus and in rapidity." "Many interdependent influences," he remarks, have combined to "produce what is practically a revolution" in the "methods" and the "processes" of the building trade. The most conspicuous is the introduction of the "ferro-

concrete process"; but this particular novelty, of transatlantic origin, is accompanied by an increasing "specialisation," which is not peculiar to the building industry alone, but is a common characteristic of the age in which we live. It belongs, in fact, to a set of circumstances which seem now not unlikely to promote the recurrence of periods more or less prolonged and frequent of irregularity of work in certain callings. Amongst these the London building trade and, in an especial measure, some of its different subdivisions are conspicuous.

In this industry at least the important question of preparatory training, to which Mr. Dearle properly devotes attention in its bearing on the main theme of his essay, is now presented in a different form from that which it assumed when apprenticeship was still a common, if no longer universal, practice. For that system offered to boys and to young men entering a trade genuine opportunities for gaining systematically, under the careful, interested guidance of skilled older artisans, thorough or sufficient knowledge of the various important details of the occupations they themselves were going to pursue in the approaching fulness of their working lives. This particular problem urgently invites, and possibly may soon receive, comprehensive treatment, perhaps even through some legislative action; but, if that treatment is to be discriminating and effective, it must, as Mr. Dearle clearly indicates,

be adapted to the altered circumstances of the present day.

Yet in some respects the problems raised in connection with the general theme, of which this essay treats, are not new but old. To veteran observers of our past industrial and social history they may seem strangely familiar. Nor are they likely soon, or perhaps at any time, to disappear in consequence of a complete solution. That something can and will be done, whether by public or concerted private action, to remove from the building trade a portion, or the whole, of the reproach of the excessive possibilities afforded by the prevalent conditions of engagement and dismissal, and the easy modes of entering and abandoning the industry, to casualised and half-trained labour, will, I imagine, be allowed by those who can remember, and contrast, the position of dock labourers before and since the dockers' strike. In this matter it is true that to some extent the London building trade still enters into an unenviable competition with dock-labour at the present time; but nevertheless the improved organisation of the latter, which has followed the notorious dispute of 1889, has, as Mr. Dearle points out, enhanced the serious difficulties of finding other work experienced by men thrown periodically out of employment in the former. It would not, however, seem impossible to alleviate this burden in the building trade by some such policy or measures as he indicates. Its weight, at any rate, might be dis-

tributed more evenly; and it would be borne in consequence with greater ease by the persons or the classes on whom it would continue to be laid. It is probable, we may assume, that something will be done in this direction in the near or the immediate future.

Yet, when all remedial action that is possible has been invoked, it is not unlikely that causes will remain in active operation which must prejudice the prospect or prevent the maintenance of regular employment in this particular group of trades; and some disturbing forces will, we may be sure, continue to affect from time to time the world of industry in general. The "cyclical" alternation, long observed and measured more or less exactly by economists, of brisk business and dull trade, seems indeed to have undergone in recent years, at any rate in English enterprise, some prolongation of the period which it was at one time wont to cover. But its influence, as Mr. Dearle maintains, can be still discovered by observant scrutiny in the industrial region to which his own inquiries are directed, although it is there obscured by the movements and results of other fluctuations of more extended or of shorter length which are peculiar to the building trades of London. Between these many variations he is careful to distinguish in the analysis which he has made; but in practice, as he shows, they act and react on one another, and seem indeed to produce an intricate bewildering complexity.

The stress he lays on the necessity of thrift to the

workmen in these industries, who, whether they be unskilled or skilled, receive, when employed, wages which are high compared with those obtained in other callings, because their own occupation is so obviously precarious, is significant and instructive. For it brings into required prominence the pertinent consideration that when everything has been accomplished in reducing the amount of unemployment that can be achieved by external aid—whether it be that of central or municipal authorities adjusting opportunely to slack seasons the work which they require, or whether it proceed from the organising genius or regulated pressure of private individuals or voluntary associations—much must still depend upon the character and conduct of the workmen. The various modes in which provision for a “rainy day” is made in actual practice are described by Mr. Dearle in some detail. I believe that the full and faithful picture he has drawn in this and other notable respects of the present condition of the building trade of London, with special reference to the risk of unemployment, will be found to be of more than transitory interest. For, while he has, I think, contrived to throw fresh and suggestive light on the immediate situation of affairs, he has also made an important contribution to the enduring class of instructive first-hand studies of industrial life.

His main aim, it should be remembered, is not the suggestion or the criticism of more or less promising

remedial measures of reform. Had he omitted altogether such considerations, he would probably have left a sense of incompleteness in the minds of many of his readers; and they will appreciate what he has said incidentally in this connection because it has been based upon a careful study of the actual facts. But his chief object, to quote his language, is to state with clearness and exactitude the various causes which have been, and are, at work, affecting the frequency and magnitude of unemployment in the London building trade, to gauge their relative intensity, and to measure and distinguish, so far as may be possible, the consequences they are respectively producing. He has desired, in fine, to seize and to present the position of affairs in this group of industries, and in this matter, as it actually exists. His essay belongs thus to the increasing class of "realistic" studies of economic problems; and it illustrates the function and advantage of such intimate investigations. For it is hardly possible to read a page, or paragraph, without feeling sensible of close contact with real life. Mr. Dearle, it will be evident, has made his observations at "first hand"; and I believe that he will not fail to communicate to his readers the vivid definite impression that he and they are in touch with concrete actualities, and are not busied on any abstract speculations, or possessed by fine-spun theories conceived in the seclusion of a library of books remote from facts. It is just this kind

of information, gathered by a trained intelligent student, which is needed, and will be accepted at its rightful value by the sensible reformer. For the pertinent and instructive facts here collected are arranged in order, and have been systematically analysed. They are not thrown down before us in an untidy heap as the crude results of hurried superficial scrutiny; but a serious endeavour has been made to ascertain their true relations and to discover and disclose their inner meaning. The candid conscientious reader will accordingly, I hope, grasp the full significance of Mr. Dearle's conclusion that the questions, which arise in the discussion of this burning popular topic of unemployment, are not one but many; and he will see that, as the several influences to which its presence can be traced, in less or greater measure, are complicated and connected mutually by action or reaction, remedial efforts, to be successful, must assail the problem, or problems, on many sides by divers modes.

This opportune, but not necessarily disheartening, lesson is enforced with added emphasis by the method of inquiry which has been pursued. The selection of one industry, or one group of industries, in a definite area, for detailed examination, recommends itself by the result achieved. For, by limiting its range, observation becomes more exact, and also, in a sense, more adequate. A comparison of the "intensive" plan adopted in this essay with the "extensive" method

sometimes followed in such studies will, I think, show a decisive balance of advantage in favour of the former course, when it can be reasonably contended, as in this case, that the example, or examples, chosen for close observation and exhaustive treatment may be considered and described as representative types.

It will, I do not doubt, be readily admitted by the readers of this essay that the building trade as a whole offers a conspicuous example of an irregular employment. The special conditions of the industry in London serve to accentuate this prominent characteristic; and recent vicissitudes in the fortunes of employers, which are, as Mr. Dearle points out, related to the interests of the employed, if they do not coincide, together with those "revolutionary" alterations in the processes of work, to which allusion has been made already in this introduction, have not in actual fact decreased the frequency, or lessened the extent, of unemployment within the last few years. The "contract" system, for example, which generally prevails, at any rate among the larger firms, brings constant changes in the numbers and the kinds of workmen who are needed at one time or another to satisfy successively the varying demands of different types of building enterprise. The common system, again, of engaging and dismissing workmen at short notice—extending over no longer period than a single hour—the "calling-round" system, as it is termed, creates a larger reserve of men normally un-

employed than that found in many other occupations. It is true, as Mr. Dearle remarks, that this system is no less fair to the men, and conducive to their interests, than it is favourable to their masters; and in actual fact, as he shows, it is consistent with a greater quantity of permanent employment, and more continuous relations between building firms and their employees, than may seem at first sight to be either probable or possible. But nevertheless the existence of a considerable "fringe" of casual labour is a noticeable feature of the industry, although it is the painters and the labourers who are more especially affected.

Partly for this reason, apprenticeship we are told is in a "chaotic" state; and any regular provision for satisfactory industrial training is at present almost wholly lacking, whatever it may be possible in the future to achieve as the result of the development of the more promising of certain tentative endeavours which are now being made. Partly for this reason also, although, as Mr. Dearle observes, trade unions can alone provide and administer "unemployment benefits" with tolerable security against malingering and other fraud, unionism is not in fact organised in sufficient strength in these occupations to attempt, if it was desirous of so doing, a permanent or drastic cure of some of the most obvious evils of casual and irregular employment. It may indeed be able to enforce trade union rates of wages, but it cannot exclude non-union

workmen. It cannot, it would seem, secure for the sons of its skilled members a prospect, fairly certain, of entering and being taught their fathers' trade in preference to crowds of workers coming into London from the provinces. It cannot check, if it wished to take such action, the intrusion of inexperienced or half-trained men or youths. Very little use has hitherto been made by employers or employed of the "vacant books" of trade unions, where such books are kept at all; and it looks as if those "labour exchanges" or "labour bureaux," on which some reformers pin their faith with reason as an effective remedy for unemployment, may discover a virgin, and perhaps not very responsive, soil for their ameliorating operations in the London building trade. To the same circumstances may be traced in a large degree those curious varieties of thrift which Mr. Dearle describes as practised by followers of this trade. In the graphic picture he has drawn the pawnshop occupies a special prominence, and enjoys apparently no undeserved a dignity. Nor is this, it would seem, to be wholly deprecated. It may even be approved for reasons which possess great cogency in the particular conditions of the industry which now obtain. "Irregularities," in fine, to quote Mr. Dearle's own words, are of the "very nature" of this group of occupations; and the ugly feature of the situation is really this—that, after full allowance has been made for necessary exceptions, a higher and more skilled class

of workmen is exposed habitually to serious risk of being out of employment in the building trade than in other callings.

But for that very reason it has deserved the pains which Mr. Dearle has given to its study. The causes and results of unemployment are displayed conspicuously in this environment. The London building trade may fittingly be treated as showing in marked prominence the features which such problems must as a general rule present. Yet it should be added that Mr. Dearle has been careful to set forth the necessary qualifications of any positive assertions that can be advanced; and he offers for inspection both sides of the shield he has been observing and holds up before his readers. From the outset to the close of his inquiry he has emphasised the complex nature of the subject he is handling; and he has not aimed at an unreal simplicity.

The table, in which at the beginning of his essay he classifies the various causes of unemployment, is on this account not the least valuable contribution he has made to the discussion. It will, I think, be found by different classes of his readers to be convenient and instructive. For it may be said to provide the opportune assistance which a sign-post, rightly placed and duly furnished, gives to the inexperienced wayfarer unacquainted with the country, while the veteran traveller will know, if he be wise, that he should not ignore such guidance on his familiar journey. In this

case perhaps he might be prepared to find that, if the building industry be not improperly regarded as a "barometer" of the prosperity or the reverse of the nation's business as a whole, the "cyclical" variation of dull or brisk trade would nevertheless be often merged in special influences which were peculiar to the building trade in general, or to that of the London area in particular. But the further distinction drawn here by Mr. Dearle between the "seasonal" and what he appropriately calls the "quasi-seasonal" variations, which are due to the dictates of fashion among other causes, and to the customs regulating holidays, will, I believe, be considered fresh and will prove suggestive. The latter variations have, in recent times at least, been more influential than the former, owing partly to the absence of continuous frost. But the effects of all the other causes of irregularity of work, which Mr. Dearle duly enumerates and describes, have, he shows, in actual fact been intensified through the consequences of the "boom" which dominated the trade from 1895 to 1900. That "boom" was succeeded by a period of depression correspondingly intense, which has, it seems, been unexampled in the experience of the employers and employed whom Mr. Dearle consulted in the course of his inquiries.

This analysis of the complex multitude of influences, which are thus at work in the London building trades to occasion unemployment, will, I think, receive the

xviii PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

ungrudging admiration of the expert student who is accustomed to observe the mutual interplay of forces in the economic sphere. But throughout the essay such a student will find much to interest and attract. He may perhaps discover something also to beguile and amuse, as in those curious modes and minute details of thrift to which I have referred. He will certainly derive no small amount of exact and useful information. In conclusion, therefore, I would venture to repeat the assertion which I made at the beginning of these prefatory remarks. Mr. Dearle, so far as I can judge, has been remarkably successful in the handling of a theme which he was fortunate in selecting. His essay forms a noteworthy contribution to a very welcome class of economic studies. He has seen for himself, and makes his readers see, a typical section of industrial life as it really is. The greater the number of such "objective" studies we can have at our disposal, executed by intelligent and trained inquirers, the more likely are we to arrive at an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the difficult social problems which confront us, and the less danger there will be of the hurried application, with the best intentions, of desperate remedies which must prove worse than the disease they are designed to cure.

L. L. PRICE.

ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD,
June 24, 1908.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM STATED	I
II. THE AREA, EXTENT, AND COMPOSITION OF THE TRADE	11
III. LONG-PERIOD VARIATIONS—	
(a) Historical Retrospect	24
(b) The Actual Tendency to Long-period Variation	37
IV. PERMANENT AND QUASI-PERMANENT CHANGES	43
V. POSITION OF THE EMPLOYERS	57
VI. CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT WITHIN THE YEAR	66
VII. GENERAL IRREGULARITY AND ITS RESULTS	82
VIII. INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND UNEMPLOYMENT	103
IX. THE INTERACTION OF DIFFERENT CAUSES	121
X. INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROVIDING AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT	133
XI. THE TRADE UNIONS AND UNEMPLOYMENT	149
XII. METHODS OF DEALING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT	175
APPENDICES	197

CHARTS

CHART SHOWING YEARLY PERCENTAGES OF UNEMPLOY- MENT SINCE 1894	<i>Facing page</i>	42
CHART SHOWING AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOY- MENT IN EACH MONTH	<i>Facing page</i>	80

PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

IN THE

LONDON BUILDING TRADES

I

THE PROBLEM STATED

TERMS such as the "Unemployed" or "The Problem of the Unemployed," which are of common occurrence in popular speech and thought, are often found misleading when the real nature and complexity of the question begin to be understood. For the expressions convey an idea of homogeneity and simplicity which these industrial maladjustments that produce the ever-varying problems of employment seldom or never possess. Further, they have unfortunately fixed popular attention on that mass of casual labour and chronic unemployment which has sprung indirectly from the more primary sources of evil, and which will scarcely be got rid of until these evils are radically dealt with. The use of the term, the unemployed, suggests the possibility of classifying a definite section of the community as such, just as the census classifies so many as carpenters, as iron-moulders, or as dock-labourers. On the other hand, it is possible to mark off paupers from non-paupers both in theory and practice, and to say who are paupers and why, when they are and where. But with the unem-

ployed we can at most say that so many are in this position, whilst a week or even a day later not only the number but the individuals comprising that number will be different.¹ The word "unemployed," therefore, may be rejected in favour of some other. Not that any single term will meet all cases, but the phrase "Problems of Unemployment" will perhaps serve best, for it suggests the complexity of a number of parts in a single whole, and the necessary analysis of the conception into its component parts. Each trade has, indeed, differences of its own, but these consist rather in distribution of emphasis than in variation in kind. The causes, therefore, that bring into existence the various sections of the unemployed will first need to be analysed, after which they can be considered in relation to their various effects on the London building trade.

The complexity of the problems to be solved is made clearer by the various classifications of unemployment and of the unemployed which have been given at various times by different authorities. Thus Mr. H. Llewellyn Smith, of the Board of Trade, regards "the term 'unemployed' as used in four distinct senses," and classifies the causes of unemployment under eight headings, all of them arising from the fundamental fact that "the relations between supply and demand for any particular kind of labour in any particular place is a

¹ An interesting illustration of this is found in Mr. Charles Booth's evidence before the Committee on Distress from Want of Employment (1895), when he first defined the unemployed as the man "who at any particular time desires to find remunerative work and fails to do so," but later rejected this in favour of "those whose periods of lack of employment are excessive, so that their earnings fall under the needs of life."

fluctuating one.”¹ Again, Mr. Charles Booth² distributes unemployment among six separate varieties and Mr. W. H. Beveridge of the Central (Unemployed) Body among four. For our present purpose it will be best to divide these influences into three classes, with a further subdivision of the individual causes comprising them. One of them embraces all those qualities inherent in man himself that hinder his chances of obtaining regular employment. The other two deal with variations in the demand for labour, and with the failure to adjust demand to supply. One of them includes those causes which produce fluctuations from time to time within a trade, and therefore consists of those influences indirectly affecting the demand for labour through the demands for its products. The third class deals with those tendencies which, given the demand for labour, are responsible for the failure to adjust supply to it, and with those which bring into a trade a larger amount of labour than is necessary for the performance of the work. Except, therefore, so far as those influences inherent in man himself effect the incidence rather than the amount of unemployment, this may be said to be the result of the failure to find the equilibrium of demand and supply in the case of labour, and the measure of divergence from this equilibrium to be the measure of unemployment.

Perhaps the most important of these causes is that which, acting through the demand for the products of labour, consists of permanent and quasi-permanent

¹ Report of the Board of Trade Labour Department on *Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed*. [C. 7192.] 1893.

² Evidence before the House of Commons Committee on Distress from Want of Employment, 1895. [Cd. 365.]

changes in the volume of employment. They arise out of the progress and development of industry, which are steady and permanent in the long run, but not as regards shorter periods or individual trades and places, since periods of progress and stagnation alternate with one another, and the rise of some trades and places counterbalances the fall of others. These changes do not affect all industries to the same extent, and a distinction is very properly made between fluctuating and non-fluctuating trades. The latter include domestic and railway service and, to a great extent, agriculture; the former the engineering, iron, ship-building, and building trades—most of the worst evils of unemployment being found with them, whilst the failures of organisation are far more felt in them. These variations may be divided into two kinds, those that are of more or less regular occurrence and temporary duration, and those which are less regular and less calculable but more permanent.

In the former class there are, in the first place, those movements in trade which lead to changes in the volume of employment over a series of years. They are often known as cyclical variations, because there is a continuous, almost regular, rise and fall in the amount of unemployment. Trade becomes brisker and brisker up to a certain point, when a sudden collapse or a gradual decay leads to complete stagnation, after which trade gradually revives; and this process continues to repeat itself. This is especially true of trades dependent on a world-wide demand or that are engaged in the manufacture of the instruments of production, but the tendency is found, though less pronounced, in many others. On the other hand, there are alternations of

prosperity and adversity, which in some trades take place in a more spasmodic manner, as special causes bring about prolonged depression and inflations.¹ Secondly, there are changes that are confined within the limits of a single year, but which recur regularly year after year at given periods. Of these the most important are the purely seasonal variations due to the weather, the coming of winter, and other similar causes, but they must also include less regular changes due to differences in the amount of rain and other climatic influences. The exact force of these latter is at a given time or in a given year quite indeterminate, though allowance can usually be made for them over a series of years. Thirdly, fluctuations, as in the work of dock and wharf labourers, from week to week and from day to day, may be included, so far as this discontinuity results from natural causes and not from defective organisation. Their influence, however, will be so bound up in practice with such shortcomings that the two can scarcely be kept separate.

Before leaving the question of seasonal changes it is necessary to mark the distinction between those directly due to unfavourable atmospheric and climatic conditions and those brought about by the exigencies of the consumer. The London season, the summer holidays, and other periods in the world of business and fashion have special influences that are not least powerful in

¹ An illustration of this is given by the trades-union figures for the building trade, employment remaining consistently good from 1865 to 1877 and from 1889 to 1899, the general depressions of 1869 and 1895 being only felt to a very moderate extent. On the other hand, it remains consistently bad from 1878 to 1888, and has continued bad since 1900, the recent general trade revival having had but a very slight effect.

the London building trade. Sometimes they directly affect the rise or fall in demand without causal connections with the seasons, whilst at others it is the greater or lesser convenience of the time of year from the consumer's point of view that determines the allocation of the work.

More permanent, but less regular, are those changes which influence the rise and fall of trades and localities, and produce permanent variations in the demand for certain kinds of work. These are, first, the transformations of industry and changes of process, which are inseparable from a dynamic and progressive society, and cause disturbances in direct proportion to the rapidity with which they take place. Such are changes in the use of materials, in methods of construction or production, and in the proportion of machinery to hand labour. Secondly, we get migrations of trades or of particular processes from one town or locality to another. In the building trades, where the actual construction is fixed in a certain place, the questions of importance are those of foreign importation, the doing of certain kinds of work outside the district, and, in London, the giving out of contracts to provincial firms. Finally, irregular fluctuations in fashion and changes in demand must be carefully distinguished from those more regular yearly ones already commented on.

In considering the causes that produce a failure to adjust the supply of labour to the demand for it, the demand for its products being given, we have to deal with influences which bring into a trade more labour than is required to carry out the necessary work—the results of defects, whether necessary or avoidable, in the

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organisation of the labour market. We are therefore concerned with various questions of friction and leakage, and not least with the limited mobility of labour and capital. Leakage between job and job is in most trades only an occasional occurrence, but in others, where a man is taken on for a job and put off at the end of it, it has a considerable effect in producing unemployment. Again, there is often a failure at an equitable adjustment of supply between a number of firms where busy times in some correspond with slack periods in others: and each firm in its busy season draws partially or wholly on a separate reserve of labour.¹ Or, again, the same may take place between one locality and another, because the supply of labour may be insufficiently mobile, and employers may be short of hands in one district whilst men are tramping the streets in another. A further cause of injury in an unorganised market is the changes that take place among the employers—death, removal, alterations in the business, or failure, which mean often the substitution of new for old employers who often bring with themselves into the business a new set of men to the displacement of the old hands. Changes among foremen, which are much more frequent, have this effect too, as each man generally has his own list of men whom he knows and takes on. Finally, in the unorganised trades—and not least in certain portions of the building trade—a number of failures of other

¹ For instance, one firm, A, employs 100 men on Monday and 50 on Tuesday, and another, B, 50 on Monday and 100 on Tuesday, and the maximum number required for each day is 150. If the men who are not required by A on Tuesday find employment with B, this number is not exceeded. If, however, A draws the 50 men he requires one day only from one source, and B from another, there will be 200 men on the work, of whom 100 are only partially employed.

trades, and quasi-unemployables are apt to pick up a precarious living in them by casual labour, to the detriment of the *bonâ-fide* workmen.

Finally, those causes of unemployment that are inherent in man himself, either individually or in the mass, are by no means limited to mental, moral, and intellectual defects. For, on the one hand, there is sickness, old age, and accident, and, on the other, vice, laziness, and drunkenness, though incidentally lack of thrift is less a cause of unemployment than of distress from lack of employment. Again, collectively, it may be necessary to consider the lack of good relations between masters and men, bad or mistaken trade policy, the effect of strikes, the question of defective training, and, above all, the general mobility and efficiency of labour. As regards individuals, however, personal shortcomings determine not so much whether a certain man shall be unemployed or not, as on whom lack of employment produced by quite other causes shall fall; but when it is a question of employing more or less labour the influence of a greater or less degree of efficiency on employment is important: nor even in individual cases is it entirely negligible.

These causes seldom act separately; on the contrary, many of them interact upon one another very distinctly. Nor is it merely a case of one producing another, but the results of most of them overlap in a most perplexing manner. Thus the better or worse organisation of supply will in a large measure depend on the presence or absence of changes in demand. A cyclical boom will often tend to conceal and a depression to accentuate the influence of more permanent changes;

and the one may decrease, the other increase, the force of seasonal variations. Casual and irregular work often makes a casual and inefficient workman, and the greater or less regularity of work may be proportional to the efficiency of the workers. Briefly summing up, we may classify the various tendencies making for lack of or irregular employment as follows:—

I.—Changes in the Demand for Labour:—

A. *Regular but Temporary Variations*—

- i. Cyclical and other changes over a period of years.
- ii. Changes within the year, whether (a) purely seasonal or (b) due to the consumer.
- iii. Changes within periods of less than a year.

B. *Irregular but More Permanent Variations*—

- i. Changes of methods, processes, or materials.
- ii. Migrations of trades or of individual processes.
- iii. Fluctuations of fashions and similar changes in demand.

II.—Failure to Adjust the Supply of Labour to the Demand for it, the latter being given:—

- i. Leakage between one job and another; or,
 - ii. One firm and another; or,
 - iii. One district and another.
 - iv. The effects of changes among the employers.
- [It is influences of this sort, it may be noted, that have the greatest effect in promoting the growth of casual labour.]

III.—Causes Inherent in Human Nature:—

A. *In the Individual*—

- i. Physical defects.
- ii. Moral defects.
- iii. Defects of individual employees.

B. *Collective*—

Such are, want of trade organisation, the immobility of labour, and defective industrial training.

In applying the consideration of these various influences to the London building trades, one must remember that no one trade is affected quite in the same way as any other, and that, the distribution of emphasis being different, each one has to that extent special problems of its own. It is the aim of the present writer to describe as closely as possible the condition of affairs as it has appeared to him. In so doing, the attempt will be made to treat more fully those of the tendencies just enumerated that appear of the greatest importance, whilst touching more lightly and in less detail on others. Where, moreover, several of them appear to be acting in combination, the endeavour will be made to consider them as they operate in actual practice, and not to strive after an artificial separation into their component elements. To a great extent my object is to state as clearly as in me lies what are the causes at work, what the comparative intensity of each, and, above all, the condition of affairs as it appears to me to be. The suggestion of remedies and reforms will be touched on but lightly, or will be left to the judgment of the reader.

II

THE AREA, EXTENT, AND COMPOSITION OF THE TRADE

A CERTAIN amount of preliminary difficulty confronts one in the choice of the area to which the London building trade is to be limited. The one most naturally adopted is that made use of by Mr. Charles Booth in *Labour and Life of the People of London*, and by Mr. Aves in his section on the building trade, namely, the area of the administrative county of London, which is also the census area. It has obvious advantages, not only for purposes of comparison with previous investigations such as this, but because the census and other returns dealing with London refer to this area, and as a consequence more definite and more exact figures are obtainable. Further, what the ordinary man understands by London is this very census area, with possibly the addition of the borough of West Ham, and not the rather vague and indefinite district of trade unionism—the twelve-mile radius from Charing Cross. On the other hand, to neglect this latter district and to consider only the administrative county is apt to give a false idea of the London trade as a whole. Many things can only be properly understood when we consider both the central area that in many places is practically covered and these extra-metropolitan districts that are still being

opened up. The increased competition among employers in the trade is due largely to the far greater number of suburban builders, who begin to compete with the older and more central firms for the contracts of the whole district. The real growth of building in London can only be understood in reference to that of the rising districts, and the centrifugal tendencies at work have had an important influence on the history and development of the trade—a tendency that has been gradually increasing during the last twenty years. New building, as distinct from reconstruction, has come to a standstill in some of the boroughs of London, whilst even in the present depression a great deal of building still continues in the outskirts. Hence the real increase that took place during the last decade can only be fully grasped when the previous decline of numbers in the administrative county is taken into consideration. Whilst therefore, for the reasons already given, the present monograph will deal chiefly with the area comprised within the administrative county, it will be necessary to remember the influence that the other parts of the London district exert upon it, and the returns for the inner will be especially affected by those given for the outer ring.

A further difficulty is brought about in deciding what processes and what classes of workmen can be included in the trade, for recent changes in methods of building construction, the great growth of specialisation, and the new materials used all cause various sections of other trades—such as iron-workers and electricians—to take part in building construction, whether or not they replace the older and better known sections of workers. It is, however, undesirable, and not always possible, to

treat such operatives as fully as those branches which are solely engaged in building work. In the first place, there are no separate classifications of such workers, but they are included in the general totals for the whole of their own trades. Whilst they do not yet occupy any definite position in the building trade, the part they play is still important, though generally indefinite. Moreover, they are often rather the cause of unemployment in others than themselves its victims. For to them this part of their sphere represents a new opening for work and so—setting aside the maladjustment of supply to demand—increases their openings for employment. On the other hand, their presence in the trade often causes distress among the regular workers in it, since the new processes they have introduced have often caused a reduction of the work done by the latter. It will therefore be possible, as a general rule, to confine the treatment of the subject of unemployment to those sections that are included under the census heading of the building trades.¹

Within the county of London the building trade group occupies the chief place, and except for a slight decline between 1880 and 1890, its numbers have been steadily increasing. They rose from about 87,000 in 1860 to about 108,500 in 1870, and again, thanks to the prosperous years between 1870 and 1877, to 133,500 in 1880. Then followed a decline, partly the result of a

¹ These are: builders, builders' labourers, carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, bricklayers' labourers, masons, masons' labourers, slaters and tilers, plasterers, plasterers' labourers, paperhangers, whitewashers, painters, decorators and glaziers, plumbers, gasfitters, locksmiths, and bell-hangers; to these also should be added, house and shop fitters (furnishing woodwork), lock and key makers, and gasfittings makers (general metal trades).

general falling-off in trade which began about 1878 and was accentuated in the building trades by several big disputes, notably the strike at the Law Courts in 1878. It had not been sufficient to make its influence much felt on the numbers returned in 1880, but the long-continued depression during the next decade left its mark, the result being a decrease of 4000 to 129,432, or 3 per cent., compared with an increase of 25,000 or 24 per cent. This result was not solely due to the depression, but was brought about by other causes. For it was about this time that the steady outflow of population to places round London began to become important. London began to extend its borders, producing a centrifugal tendency of the population, and artisans in the building trade moved out into the suburbs. The result was that whilst in many of the London boroughs the numbers declined, the population of, and the number of building trade artisans in, the biggest suburban places became considerable, amounting in the five chief urban districts alone to nearly 17,000.¹ Moreover, of the four metropolitan counties, Middlesex and Surrey had over 18,000 and Kent and Essex over 19,000 engaged in house-building, and large portions of these counties lie either in or just over the border of the London district. Previous to this decade it is probable that such a centrifugal tendency was not much felt; for it was during these years that many of the outer boroughs began to be opened out. Up to as late as 1886 very large portions

¹ The five referred to are those for which separate returns are given in the census, having a population of 50,000 or more. In the London district, in the census of 1890, these were Croydon (3897), Willesden (2791), Tottenham (2820), West Ham (5639), and Leyton (1782), or a total of 16,929 operatives engaged in the building trades. See Appendix.

of Hampstead were under pasture, and the neighbourhood, if we may believe the census, developed very rapidly; so too did Wandsworth and Lewisham, though not to such an extent as after 1890, and the influences at work certainly helped to produce the decrease in numbers in census London. Similarly the figures for the smaller area give no adequate notion of the increase that followed. Certainly the actual increase was considerable, from 129,432 to 143,026 in the census of 1900, and including house and shopfitters (2251), and makers of locks, keys, and gasfittings (756), the total number engaged reached 146,333, or an addition of 16,000, or about 12½ per cent. But round London the increase was far greater. The urban districts distinguished in the census, eight in number, contained an additional 40,000, and the five enumerated in 1891 rose from 16,929 to 29,624.¹ The number of building trade hands in the metropolitan counties also was greatly augmented: Middlesex rose from 18,361 to 33,411, Surrey from 18,525 to 29,566, Kent from 19,405 to 32,384, and Essex, biggest of all, 19,548 to 37,621; and in some of these counties very much of the increase could be put down to places in the London district. In Middlesex, for instance, the three largest urban areas contained 12,555, and smaller ones within the radius at least another 15,000; and Surrey, in addition to its 7000 odd at Croydon, had over 1800² at Wimbledon, 1600² at Kingston, 1186 at Richmond,² as well as lesser numbers elsewhere. Roughly speaking, the whole London district in 1900 must have amounted

¹ The other three distinguished in 1900, but not in 1891, were Hornsey (1777), East Ham (4118), and Walthamstow (4907). Many smaller urban districts now possess a large building trade population.

² Including other constructive trades which in smaller urban areas are not distinguished from those engaged in house building.

to from 210,000 to 220,000 in all; whilst the increase would be not 16,000 as in the census area only, but something much nearer 40,000. It is noteworthy, too, that the increases were greatest in Essex and Middlesex where a larger proportion at any rate of the building population comes in the London area than in Kent or Surrey.

The distribution of this increase can best be understood by considering the figures for the various branches. Here there is less material available, and, apart from the London area, the only detailed figures are those given for the counties and for the five urban districts distinguished in 1891. Though these latter cannot do full justice to the increase that has been taking place, they illustrate the difference between what is taking place inside and outside the administrative county. One remarkable point is the fall between 1880 and 1900 of the numbers employed in the more purely constructive trades, a tribute to the greater increase of new construction without than within, though special causes were at work in some cases. The stonemasons fell from 7800 to 6500, the carpenters from 39,700 to 34,500, the bricklayers from 23,600 to 19,400, and the plasterers and paperhangers from 8500 to 6900. On the other hand, the painters and plumbers, who depend far more in proportion on repairing work than on new construction, increased in the London county area from 28,000 in 1880 to 32,500 in 1890 and 35,800 in 1900, and from 7300 to 9300 and 10,800 respectively—the increase, though continued, being less both absolutely and relatively in the second decade. The locksmiths and gasfitters showed little change up to 1890 and then a slight increase.

After 1890 the decreases that had previously taken place were checked, though not in every case did the numbers reach the figures of 1880. A great increase took place in the composite class of builders and builders' labourers, but the most remarkable was that of the bricklayers,¹ with whom a decrease of 4000 was followed by an increase of 6500, the biggest on record, being 1500 more than that between 1870 and 1880 ($33\frac{1}{2}$ as against 27 per cent.) and only 100 less than the increase for twenty years previous to 1880—a striking testimony to the boom in new construction and the rapidity with which men rushed into the trade. The plasterers, too, regained their figures for 1880, rising from 6865 to 8550 as against 8500; but neither the stonemasons nor the carpenters increased to this extent, the former only reached 6993, the latter 35,485, but in both cases special causes were at work, and there was in each trade a considerable increase in suburban districts. This, again, was greatest with bricklayers, of whom there were 6415 in 1900 where there had been 3341, or just 92 per cent. increase; but the stonemasons increased from 673 to 1158 (72 per cent.), the carpenters by 2500 (53 per cent.), plumbers by 903 (68 per cent.), the painters from 3895 to 6112, and other trades from 2958 to 6333 or more than double. These figures serve to check rash assumptions from the London county statistics and to show an increase in all branches, though less in some than in others.

Some care is needed in defining the building trade, as certain reservations and distinctions are necessary. The general census heading of the building and constructive trades includes branches that are not strictly

¹ Here the figures are for bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, etc.

part of the former, but fortunately these latter—including road-paving and mending and much general navvy work—are allowed their separate sub-headings, though in practice there is some overlapping between various branches of constructive work. The general designation, builder and contractor, gives emphasis to this point. Sewer work is, however, rightly included under building, not only as being a necessary adjunct to it, but because it is nearly always carried out by building firms and performed by building trade artisans. One or two sections engaged in the work are, however, classified under other headings in the census—house and shop-fitters (2557 in 1900) under furniture and woodwork and a few smaller branches with miscellaneous metals. Further, the existence of a great mass of repairs, decorations, and renewals makes it impossible to limit the building trades to purely constructive work, and the best definition will be, that they consist of all work occupied in the building of houses and structures above ground, and in providing accessories, sanitary or otherwise, necessary to render them habitable, and carrying out the renewals, repairs, and decoration that they require. More shortly we may call it, “the trade engaged in the erection, equipment, and upkeep of human habitations.”

The employing class was described in *Life and Labour of the People of London*¹ as divided into four sections—the high price builders, builders and contractors, speculative builders, and jobbing builders, the latter engaged chiefly in repairs that may vary from those in a large public building occupying months to others that last but a few days. To this one ought perhaps to

¹ This section of the work was written by Mr. Ernest Aves.

add a fifth class, that of the small master builders and master workmen, who are found in large numbers in suburban districts and in such boroughs as Stepney and Poplar. Mostly coming under the fourth class just mentioned, they are often confined to the small work of their own immediate neighbourhoods, not having capital, means, or training to do more. Their existence has an important bearing on questions of unemployment, because not only do they employ very few men, but those they have they can seldom keep on regularly, and much of the casual employment in some districts is due to the existence of this class. Indeed it is the distinction between the type of work and the size of the contract undertaken that will be important. Employers for the present purpose have indeed to be considered as doing contract work or speculative, and new work or repairs. But above all, in questions dealing with unemployment, the size of the contract is important, whether it is big, medium, or small, but especially whether it is large work carried out by large and small by small firms. The distinction will come up again for fuller treatment later on. Between employers and employed come the clerks of the works representing the builder's client and looking after his interest, and the foreman who is often the sole medium for communication between the employer and his men. The class which includes architects and engineers is in less direct touch with the workmen.

Among the operatives the bricklayers, the men who wield the trowel and lay the bricks, have been described as the "recognised stock hands" (*Life and Labour*), and in addition to their ordinary work, they lay drains

and set stoves and chimneypieces and repair ovens; much tiling work is also done by them. They numbered (in census London) 25,928 in 1900.¹ The masons are to stonework what the bricklayers are to brickwork, and more. For not only do they lay or rather fix the stone, but it is worked by them in the yards, when brought to the works in the rough state. It has been more and more the habit in recent years for the stone to be prepared at the quarries where it is hewn, and the use of manufactured stone is much more common. There are various smaller branches which are all included under the heading in the census.² The total number of this class is comparatively small—only 6082 in 1900 including all the smaller sections. They are mostly engaged in the larger works, and the amount of repairing work done by them is comparatively small. The carpenters and joiners, on the other hand, are, with the exception of the painter, decorator, and glazier class, the largest in London, and at the last census was only outnumbered by 35,774 to 35,485, and that for the first time. As with the masons the *Census Dictionary* shows the inclusion of a few smaller sections, with the main body, who are not strictly engaged in building. House and shop fitters numbered a further 2551 in 1900. The main distinction between carpenters and joiners is that the latter usually work in the shop and are, taking an average, the more skilled, and the former on the building, and it is usually more marked than any between masons in the yard and those working on the

¹ That is, 13,726 bricklayers and 12,202 bricklayers' labourers.

² E.g. stone carvers, granite, marble, slate, and monumental masons, marble polishers, and slate enamellers. In practice many of these are distinct trades.

actual construction. The class would probably be found to include a certain proportion of handy men. The plasterers, with whom are included paperhangers and whitewashers—8550 in all—are occupied with the work of covering the brick or other surface, whilst they also claim much tiling work and had a long-standing dispute with the bricklayers on the subject. A few are employed on the manufacture of fibrous plaster slabs. Paperhangers, with whom the census includes white-washers, do the work their name implies. In many ways they are more closely connected with painters than with the plasterers. The slaters and tilers do that part of the work that has not been seized either by the latter or the bricklayers. Painters and decorators with glaziers form the largest and also the most composite class in the trade. They number in all over 35,000, not to mention an additional body of hangers-on, the failures of other trades who make part of their living in this way. The standard of skill varies immensely, from the highest type of work of such men as grainers and liners to the practically unskilled brush-hand engaged chiefly on outside work. Other classes are the plumbers (10,766), gasfitters (5161), and locksmiths (419),¹ and also an indefinite but increasing number of electricians who are being introduced to do the growing electrical wire work. They are largely displacing gasfitters and, to some extent, plumbers, especially so far as the latter are engaged in gaswork.

A large number of unskilled labourers are engaged

¹ Figures in this paragraph if not otherwise given refer to the 1900 census. Likewise those in the next. The figures in this paragraph give both artisans and their labourers.

in the trade, for most skilled processes have each their appropriate labourer. Of these the bricklayers' labourers are the largest class, amounting to 12,202 as against 13,726 artisans out of the total of 25,928. The proportion of masons' labourers is less, namely 1079 to 5003, and that of plasterers' still smaller, 821 to 5160. Other classes are not specified, but probably plumbers' mates bear the largest proportion to their respective artisans, carpenters' labourers and painters' labourers being but a very small percentage. There were also in 1900, 9130 general builders' labourers. There are also some branches not distinguished in the census, such as scaffolders, who are included under bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, and other special types of labourers, such as hoisters and timbermen. Scaffolders, though not ranking as artisans, are up to a point skilled workmen, and upon them the lives of other workmen depend. The rate of wage is $7\frac{1}{2}$ d., or $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in advance of that paid to the ordinary labourer. Whilst requiring a certain amount of skill, however, it does not need the long training necessary for an artisan.

Finally, the subject of age distribution needs mention here, as it has an important bearing on many questions connected with the trade, and will require fuller consideration. Both with artisans and labourers the period of most rapid increase is between 20 and 35, whilst the numbers are also large between 35 and 45; then there is at first a steady and after that a rapid decline. For the whole trade up to 15 the census of 1900 gave 704, between 15 and 20, 12,263 or an average 2453 for each year of age, from 20 to 25, 17,688 (3538 per annum), and for the next five decennial periods 33,177, 32,479,

26,385, 14,917, and 4676 respectively, an average for each year of 3318, 3248, 2638, 1492, 468; whilst finally there were 658 over the age of 75. Except with the plumbers, where the proportion under 20 is far greater, whilst the decline in number takes place sooner and at a more rapid pace, this is fairly true of all trades. Next to plumbers the carpenters and joiners have the largest proportion under 20, whilst the proportion of young labourers is generally smaller than that of lads in the corresponding skilled trades. It is probable that an analysis of the census figures would show that of those under 20 far the largest proportions were between 19 and 20, and 18 and 19. The significance of these figures¹ on the question of the recruiting of the trade must not be lost sight of; and the great increase between 20 and 25 points either to the presence of a number of men trained elsewhere, or to the presence of men who have not learnt it in orthodox fashion. The small number of labourers under 20 points to a boyhood spent in other trades, and to the presence of many rather older men who grow up without learning a craft and so seek their living in the ranks of the unskilled.

¹ For fuller details see Appendix C. Figures above for census London only.

III

LONG-PERIOD VARIATIONS

(a) Historical Retrospect

To deal properly with this subject it will be necessary to preface any treatment of causes and tendencies by an historical retrospect, and because differences exist between the London trade and that of other parts of the country, the general development must first be touched on more lightly before a fuller treatment of that of London is undertaken. Part of this chapter, therefore, will be devoted to purely historical matters, and especially to what has taken place within the last two decades; after which attention can be given more effectively to the comparative force of various co-operating causes. Finally, it will be desirable to weigh, as far as may be, the real intensity of long-period, or as they are usually called "cyclical," variations in employment.

Periods of great prosperity have during the last fifty years, in the building as in many other trades, alternated with others of severe depression. This group of trades, indeed, often acts as a "barometer" of national prosperity. "We are the last to feel the effects of depression: and the last to feel the effects of revival, always the last," said Mr. Stanley Bird in answer to the Chairman of the Royal Commission on Labour. Increased building is one of the uses to which sooner or

later part of any increase in wealth is put, and a decrease will invariably lead to a curtailment of building operations. Moreover, the increase of trade generally has an even more direct effect in the demand that it creates for new or enlarged factories and warehouses and for places of business generally. In recent years the comparative improvement in the trade of the North over the continued stagnation of London and the South may be traced to the "boom" of the last few years in the cotton and iron trades. The building trade, therefore, is affected clearly, if sometimes less quickly, than trade generally by the results of such changes, and rises and falls accordingly, if with less violence. On the other hand, it sometimes experiences influences peculiar to itself, which disguise the working of more regular tendencies. This will be found in the sequel to apply particularly to the London of to-day.

For the twelve years previous to the collapse of 1878 the trade enjoyed almost uniform prosperity, and the depression of the later 'sixties passed without any violent decline. A few years of very great prosperity then produced a rise in wages all over the country, and a rapid increase in the numbers and power of the trade unions.¹ Then came the commercial depression and financial

¹ Unfortunately the only figures available are those of the Carpenters and Joiners Amalgamated Society, and these in the earlier years of the amalgamation represented but a very small proportion of the men, so that one must allow for the fact that the numbers unemployed in the union would less fairly represent the whole number of men in the trade than in later years. Even now it is probable that the trade-union percentage would correctly represent that of the whole trade; and Mr. George Dew (Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners) thought three non-unionists would be unemployed in the long run for every two unionists who were. It is probable however that in recent years the trades-union percentages have represented, not so much the actual number unemployed, as the variations in the volume of employment.

difficulties of 1878 and the following years, and the trade was further affected by several disastrous strikes. The result was a long-continued depression through the 'eighties; wages fell, and the membership of some of the unions decreased with alarming rapidity. Generally trade revived somewhat during 1882 and 1883, but building hardly got brisk at all, and suffered another severe depression during 1886 and 1887; this latter, though less intense in its worst years, lasted longer than in most other trades. Then came an improvement; 1889 was fair, and 1890 and 1891 good, whilst even in 1894 and 1895¹ members of the trade escaped comparatively lightly. With the summer of the latter year began a period of very great prosperity which lasted for five years; then, after a gradual decline, a very severe depression, reaching its height in 1905, and since then a slight and very slow revival.

Special local conditions have in many ways influenced the history of the trade in London. The demands of central and local authorities and of other public and quasi-public bodies have not only contributed to make it the most important of London trades, but have helped so far as they are concerned to keep employment fairly steady. Again, there is a very great demand for business premises, which fluctuates with the movements of

¹ The comparatively high percentage in 1895 was due to two high percentages caused by the frost in January and February, which even the rapid improvement in the later months could not altogether counteract. The percentages are worth quoting—

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
8.2	10.1	4.9	3.3	2.5	2.5	2.4	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.1	3.8.
Average, Whole Year								.	.	3.8	
Mar.-Dec.								.	.	2.7	

The highest average percentage was 4.1 in 1894, which over a period of years is equivalent to an average year that is neither good nor bad.

trade and is less to be relied on. The needs of a growing population produce much new building, often on speculation, and though London has largely outgrown its census area, the building trade district (twelve miles from Charing Cross) still continues to provide a large mass of employment. The centrifugal tendencies of the population, and more recently the filling up of nearly all available space in the boroughs of the "inner ring," give rise to important problems to be considered in their turn. In the result the continued expansion, even until the last few years in the census area, has provided for a steady increase in the trade. This partly explains the great steadiness in London wages, even during the worst periods of the 'eighties, whilst the very size of London, which so often hinders the work of the trades unions, yet gives security to what has been accomplished.

Between 1860 and 1870 the numbers engaged in the London building trade increased by 21,000 (nearly 20 per cent.) and wages rose 50 per cent. between 1859 and 1872,¹ when rates were fixed at 9d. an hour for carpenters, masons, plasterers, and bricklayers, and labourers and painters got $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rise, the hourly rate in the case of the latter remaining a source of friction. By 1880 the total had risen to 133,500, and the number of inhabited houses increased during the decade by nearly 70,000 (24.3 per cent.) as against 58,000, or 23.1 per cent., in the previous one, the population increasing 18.8 and 16.1 per cent. respectively. During the 'eighties, despite the collapse of 1878 and a decrease in some more central boroughs, the increase of new buildings was very great, especially in Wandsworth (10,000), Fulham (7000),

¹ Mr. Stanley Bird's evidence before the Labour Commission.

and Battersea (6500), and of between 3000 and 6000 in eight others, or nearly 60,000 in all. The numbers employed—in the census area—fell by some 4000, partly because, with the development of the suburbs, some emigration took place to the outlying districts, and partly because comparatively few entered the trade—a result of the depression. Wages, however, did not fall, though as the master builders, in refusing a rise to the carpenters in 1891, pointed out, “the building trade in London has been generally carried on at a loss for several years and for the whole time at a very small profit.” This was endorsed by the arbitrator after the strike.¹ The summer of 1890 saw an improvement, which was continued after a slight decline, and though the carpenters apparently suffered through the strike of 1891, things remained pretty good for three or four years. Even in 1894 things were reported as normal, and in 1895 after the great frost a very rapid improvement took place; and there followed a remarkable period of prosperity until the end of 1900. Reports of “seasonal falling off” are qualified as “good for time of year,” and all mention of it came later to be omitted, as a series of mild winters coincided with the general prosperity. The yearly average of unemployment fell from 3.4 in 1895 to 1.6, 1.3, 1.0, and 0.7 in the next four years. The only trade in which seasonal variations were really marked was that of the painters, who experienced some bad months even when things were at their best, and have

¹ The arbitrator in refusing the claim for increased wages said:—“Decrease of the trade of the country and the admitted excess in the supply of labour point to curtailment rather than increase of wages. An increase of the present prohibitive price would still further restrict an already restricted trade.”

since, in compensation, had intervals of good trade even in 1905 and 1906.¹ This increase in the numbers engaged in the trade was greatest outside the census area, but even within it a decrease of 4000 up to 1890 was followed by an increase of 16,000 in 1901, in spite of the fact that many of the more central boroughs were practically covered, leaving little room for new buildings. The most remarkable increase took place among bricklayers, who had decreased by 4000 and now increased by 6500, a rise of only 100 less than that of the whole twenty years previous to 1880. Hence the complaints of the men as to the overstocking of their craft during this period. Plasterers, after a slight decrease in 1880, and a much larger one in 1890 that led to complaints as to a shortage of men in the trade, all but regained their 1870 total, 8800.² Special causes were at work. (see

¹ The monthly reports of some of the unions, as given in the *Labour Gazette*, repay analysis:—

Bricklayers.—Good from March, 1895, until February, 1900, except November and December, 1895, and January, 1896 and 1897.

Carpenters and Joiners.—Good or fair from March, 1895, to November, 1900.

Masons.—Mostly good or fair in the same period with some winter exceptions.

Plasterers.—Fair (April, 1895, to May, 1900), slack (June, 1900), then bad.

Plumbers.—Fair (1895 and 1896), but since never more than moderate.

The Board of Trade's Labour Correspondent reported, "Well employed," or "Briskly employed," or "Brisk" all through 1896-1899 and in most of 1895 and 1900 for the trade as a whole. The exceptions were the painters and sometimes the plumbers in the winter months, the latter in June, 1895, the stone workers in March, 1896, and "some exceptions" in May, 1896.

² As regards complaints as to the shortage of plasterers, Mr. Aves and Mr. Booth in *Life and Labour* attributed it to the suppression of the "hawksboys" from whom the trade had been recruited, and commented on the strong position that had for some years been occupied by plasterers. But Mr. George Dew (London Building Trades' Federation) told the Labour Commission, "The builder can get abundance of plasterers; he has only got to put up a notice that he wants plasterers and there is abundance of men."

Chapter IV.) with carpenters and masons who after a considerable decline between 1880 and 1890 did little more than keep up their numbers. Painters and plumbers both increased, but less both in aggregate and proportionately than in the previous decade. The former at any rate, owing to the vast and often annually recurring amount of cleaning and decorating required in existing houses, depend more on the total mass of buildings in existence than on the annual increment. Plumbers too, though to a less extent, are affected in this way, and in their case special influences were at work (Chapter IV. *q.v.*). The very composite class of builders and builders' labourers nearly doubled itself between 1890 and 1900.¹

The great boom in the building trade that took place during these years was due to a variety of causes, and other things besides the number of new buildings constructed have to be taken into account. The actual increase in the number of inhabited houses was comparatively small, being only 17,000 as against 58,000 in the previous decade, a great increase in a few boroughs being balanced by a large decrease in others, whilst in some the numbers were practically unchanged. One cause indubitably was the rapid development of suburban areas situated outside the administrative county of London; and this gained impetus as the years went by and the number of new houses built in these parts augmented rapidly. Thus the returns for the Metropolitan Police area, which corresponds far more nearly to the building trade district, prove that the number of new

¹ Plumbers increased by 2000 (27 per cent.) up to 1891 and 1450 up to 1901; painters by 4305 and 3269 respectively.

houses and streets built showed no great increase up to 1895, after which the numbers rose with extraordinary rapidity till 1899. Since then there has been a slight decline. Again, in some of the more suburban boroughs a great increase is found. In Wandsworth and Lewisham alone the increase amounted to 19,837, and in six boroughs—Fulham, Lewisham, Paddington, Stoke Newington, Wandsworth, and Woolwich—it was 34,936 or more than double that of the whole net increase. In fact, this figure was the resultant of an addition to the total number of some 40,000 houses balanced by a decrease, in other boroughs, of well over 20,000

But such a diminution in the number of houses really implied an immense amount of constructive work, since it means the clearing and recovering of large areas. For the prosperity of the London building trades was not a matter of suburban growth nor even of rapid development in some few districts, but extended over almost the whole of London, and Stepney, Southwark, and Bethnal Green benefited almost equally with some of the districts mentioned. For new construction in the strictest sense of the word, namely, the building of houses on what had till then been vacant sites, was an influence, great though it was, of less importance than reconstruction or the replacing of old houses by new ones. The importance of this latter during the 'nineties it is scarcely possible to overestimate, for in this decade a large part of London was rebuilt. In a recent work on the *Sanitary Evolution of London*, the author (Mr. H. L. Jephson) pointed out that "the older parts of London were being rapidly rebuilt and open spaces in the rear of

buildings were being gradually covered." This accounts for the decrease in the number of houses in certain boroughs, by 3500 in Chelsea and 2500 in Bermondsey and Bethnal Green, and the almost stationary total in places like Kensington and Holborn. A couple of instances may be worth quoting. In the Boundary Street area (Bethnal Green) a large mass of slums were destroyed and replaced by a number of fine handsome buildings, the substitution of large blocks for small houses providing a great deal of work. Again, Kensington was described by Mr. F. A. Moore before the Labour Commission in 1892 as a district where building was always going on, and yet in the last census decade the net increase was only 47. And even allowing for a diminution in later years, yet the actual number in course of construction in 1900 was still about 180. In Holborn, again, a large amount of slum property was replaced by the County Council and others.

In fact, during this decade, and especially in its later years, investment in house property of one form or another was common. The County Council alone was estimated by Mr. Jephson to have carried out "an amount of building operations which, if conducted at one spot, would have resulted in the formation of a town of nearly 36,000 inhabitants." A very large amount more was done by various housing companies and syndicates in the way of erecting workmen's dwellings, and it is noteworthy that nearly all the newer buildings of this type belong to the last census decade. Nor was this movement confined to the housing of the working classes, but extensive operations for purely commercial purposes were carried out—warehouses along the river,

offices in the city, shops in the West End—and further investment in house property was, previous to the war, encouraged by a cheap and almost redundant supply of money and by many other favouring conditions. Property owners of all sorts and for various reasons carried out all kinds of changes, improvements, and replacements in their property. Everywhere and in every way trade boomed, in suburban development, in new building, in reconstruction, and in all sorts of smaller work on house property.

Among trades unionists unemployment sank almost to zero, the returns being for many months below 1 per cent. and below 2 per cent. for some years almost without exception. Even the less-organised casual workers could get regular employment. In spite of the large and constant supply of artisans from the provinces and the “admitted excess in the supply of labour previous to 1891,” many employers, especially the smaller and the less reputable firms, were for a time simply hung up for lack of men.¹ The larger firms, indeed, except perhaps in 1898 and 1899, experienced no very great difficulty, the provincial supply and the desire to get the longest and steadiest jobs telling in their favour; but a foreman told me that he then found the men more independent and more difficult to manage. Though little change in the rate of wages took place for twenty years after the agreement of 1872, yet in the next ten years the London Building Trades’ Federation secured three

¹ A shop foreman of a non-union shop said, “We had to advertise for lack of men;” a casual worker in Stepney, “Some years ago things were so busy you did not have to go and look for a job, but as soon as you had finished one some one would come up and ask you to do another;” and a small master bricklayer that “we were practically working continuously when trade was good.”

rises of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. an hour in 1892, 1896, and 1901, a rapid rise somewhat similar to that previous to 1872.¹ In some ways the results of such pronounced prosperity were less satisfactory. "What forms a depression from the artisans' point of view," said one big contractor, "is often a blessing from the masters' point of view. Moderate prosperity produces harmony, over-prosperity produces mutual dissatisfaction, more frequent rows, slackness, wages disputes. When men were scarce they would be found slacking, impudent, and cheeky:" and the plasterers' strike of 1899 appears to have left some ill-feeling behind. Speculation, too, was rife during these years, and the numbers, both of employers and men, who entered the trade increased largely, the census of 1900 showing an altogether unusual increase of the former. Moreover, in the building trade there are always a certain number tramping from place to place and especially to London, and a large additional number flocked to it. Probably, too, London men during these years entered the trade in greater numbers than before or since, for as a rule, except the man who drifts into the position of a casual labourer or painter, they do not seem to enter the trade very largely. The large increases in this decade of men between 15-20 and 20-25, both the total number and in proportion to other ages, can probably be but partly accounted for by the arrival of provincially-trained artisans.² As a rule the numbers

¹ This refers to the carpenters and joiners, masons and bricklayers, whose hourly rates rose from 9d. to 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. That of the plasterers rose to 11d. Plumbers who had secured 10d. an hour before 1892 raised their rate to 11d. Labourers' wages rose from 6d. to 7d. an hour. Painters' wages are more open to question, but building firms usually pay 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and the West End decorating firms 9d. an hour.

² For the figures as to the ages as drawn from the census I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Beveridge.

between the ages of 25 and 45 decreased in proportion, a testimony to the comparatively small number from whatever source who had entered the trade in previous years. The increase between 45 and 65, in every case except the bricklayers, testified to the great need for labour, which caused such a number of men to continue employed to a far later period of life. This is further testified to by the decrease or slow increase of trades union superannuation funds up to 1901; but all the trades union funds as well as their increase in membership tell the same story. Equally, of course, they have since told the story of decline.

The boom reached its height in 1899, was on the ebb in 1900, and in the autumn of 1901 the decline set in. The depression that has followed—more permanent causes apart—has many of the marks of an ordinary cyclical one, but in other ways it has been quite abnormal. In June, 1900, the percentage reached 2 per cent. for the first time since 1896, and “scarcely so busy” and “not so well employed” were reported in the *Labour Gazette* for October and November; 1901 was quiet with a further decline in the autumn, and after the Coronation “supply of labour abundant in all branches” was reported. Then came a further decline in the autumn and all through 1903, 1904, and 1905. The first half of 1906 was still worse, and then up to last March things were slightly better, but from May to July they were worse than ever, partly owing to the wet summer. A fairly fine August and arrears of work found that month the best for three years.

All ranks are affected by a depression that has been remarkable as much for its length as its severity, the

masters complaining of the increased competition and the close-cutting of prices, which with them corresponds to unemployment among the men. The most startling unanimity was exhibited by both employers and representatives of the men as to its intensity. Even those who hoped for or had experienced some slight improvement saw little or no prospect of any pronounced or immediate recovery.¹ Among the answers given were: "Likely to be the worst winter on record," "the worst winter for twenty-five years," "the most disastrous year for twenty years," "never recollect being so badly off since we have been in the trade;" and though a few hoped for a slight improvement, more saw no chance of this or even feared a further decline. The answer of the secretary to the London Master Builders' Association sums up the general verdict, "The state of trade has been declining for some years past and has not yet touched bottom, if the opinion of experienced men in the trade is of any value." One firm added that it saw "little chance of employment even for its regular hands;" another that "several good men who had worked for it for years were walking the streets." The prosperity of the iron and cotton trades has assisted some sort of a revival in the north; but no such stimulus has come from the unsatisfactory condition of London trade generally.

¹ The opinions expressed in this paragraph refer to the winter of 1905-1906, being obtained in answer to inquiries addressed by me to various employers and trade unionists on behalf of the Stepney Distress Committee, by whose courtesy I am permitted to quote them.

(b) The Actual Tendency to Long-period Variation

It remains to ask how far the variations we have just been considering can be taken as an example of ordinary cyclical fluctuations, how far they have been due to abnormal causes, and how far the London trade generally is affected by changes of this character? Over the country as a whole the trade would appear to follow the course of other fluctuating ones to some limited degree; and a fuller discussion of what takes place in London will be needed, with especial reference to events of the last fifteen years. To anticipate, one will probably find many of the ordinary cyclical causes at work, modified, intensified, or counteracted by others; and the exact part played by ordinary and abnormal causes will have to be measured.

In the first place, an inevitable reaction has followed the vast prosperity of a few years ago; and over-prosperity has led to depression and all its results, and the intensity of the one has been inevitably in proportion to that of the other. Moreover, the recent boom accompanied, and partly resulted from, some especially favourable conditions, and these latter have been followed by some particularly unfavourable ones. A low bank rate, cheap and plentiful money, comparatively low rates, and no very great opening for investment have been replaced by a high bank rate, high rates,¹ lack of money consequent, among other things, on the war and the locking up of much capital in municipal enterprises and

¹ The county rate was 13½d. (1900-1901) and 17d. in 1906-1907; the education and many of the borough rates have also risen largely. Other charges have also increased.

improvements. All this has tended to make the depression more pronounced; but probably it was bound to follow in any case. Secondly, we find among the results of the recent boom has been an over-production of commodities, that is, of houses, and an over-supply of labour. Trade conditions caused everything to be built that could be built, especially the smaller work, the present shortage of which is one great cause of bad times. Moreover, generally favourable conditions led to a vast speculation in building operations, and especially encouraged the investment of capital in the improvement of property. Now, however, not only has the over-production that has practically covered certain districts given way to stagnation, but owners of house property naturally and legitimately prefer to patch up rather than rebuild and to do as little as possible even of that.

Meanwhile the supply of labour has grown in answer to the demand for it, till the overstocking of the market, in all but the busiest periods, has resulted, and this is perhaps one of the worst features of this condition of fluctuations of this sort; so that now "there is a pretty large reserve of labour such as prosperity always brings in its train." Very much the same thing had happened in earlier years in the 'sixties and 'seventies, and even the depression of the 'eighties did not sufficiently reduce the numbers entering the trade, since we hear of "an undoubted excess of labour in 1891." Further, it is probable that the recruiting of labour from the provinces, being less susceptible to regulation, has a greater tendency to cause an over-supply; and this redundancy of labour in the trade will prove one of the most difficult problems of the future. Conditions connected with the

organisation and employment of labour in the trade (see Chapter VII.) help to accentuate this difficulty and will receive fuller treatment later.

So far, however, though special influences have been at work to prolong and intensify, both the late prosperity and the present slackness have exhibited most of the general characteristics of cyclical variations. Over-prosperity, on the one hand, producing speculation, and over-production, on the other, a rush of labour into the trade and consequent over-supply, are followed by a falling-off in employment and a great decline leading to complete stagnation followed by a slow recovery. Such is the usual description of tendencies to cyclical variation, and such has occurred in the case before us, allowing for the unusual length of the inflation and the delay in the recovery of the trade. So far, though some exceptional influences have been at work, the present situation is in many ways but an ordinary though exaggerated long-period decline. There have, however, been special influences at work preventing a recovery. The after-effects of the war have caused and still cause a quite unusual scarcity of money, and a high bank rate due in part to this has further checked production, especially when, during the winter,¹ it remained for months at 6 per cent. Heavy expenses of production, whether inevitable or otherwise, have curtailed investment in house property; whilst with the development of railways and motor traction, the residential classes tend to movement to the outskirts of or beyond the London district; and these latter causes especially tend to retard the recovery of the trade. Moreover, the rebuilding of

¹ 1906-1907.

the older parts of London is much of it nearly completed and many districts are practically covered. On the other hand, each new suburb tends to get a building trade of its own as it rises to importance; and its chief firms compete with those of older standing elsewhere, and so increase and intensify competition for the existing supply of work. Exceptional influences, therefore, would seem to be imposed on the ordinary tendencies to long-period variations and to be preventing such a revival as might be expected.

This tendency in the present case for long-period fluctuations to work themselves out in a way peculiar to this trade will probably be found to be the normal state of affairs. It is sometimes thought the trade is susceptible mainly to seasonal and only to a limited extent to cyclical fluctuations. In recent years, at any rate since 1895, the small amount of frost has minimised or at least reduced the former and given fuller play to the latter. Previous to this, a series of severe winters tended to mask the changes between one year and another. Unfortunately we have little data, except in recent years, for estimating the condition of affairs in London apart from the country as a whole, but there is little reason to suppose that they were very different, though during the last few years the trade in London has not followed the same course as that of England generally. The trade of the country in the 'sixties was worst about 1868, but the decline in the building trade was greatest in 1870; and in the improvement that followed trade generally was best in 1872, building not till 1877. In the depression of 1878 both were worst in that year, but general trade rallied first, and the same happened

IV

PERMANENT AND QUASI-PERMANENT CHANGES

APART from those changes which extend over a series of years or which, as with seasonal variations, accomplish themselves within a single one, recurring in both cases with more or less regularity, there are others which have little or nothing of this character, but, once accomplished, bring about a definite and permanent change in the conditions of industry and the demand for labour. Perhaps the best understood of these is the substitution of machinery for hand labour or of factory for domestic production. Some of them are more or less continuous and so far calculable, especially in factory industry, after a certain stage of development, when slow and gradual changes often allow the supply of labour to adapt itself easily to the change of environment. The less developed, however, the trade is, the greater proportionally is the difficulty of making the change. The building trade, however, even in its most advanced stages, is far more liable to sudden and partially catastrophic movements, which after a slow and often unnoticed beginning come to a head quickly, as in the case of the new ferro-concrete process. The trade, moreover, if less liable to some of the ordinary conditions of industry, is subject to influences peculiar to

itself, and so far as these have some bearing on the questions at issue, they may be briefly touched on.

In the words of *Life and Labour of the People* it is "a great industry dependent on a local demand," which dependence is one of its most marked characteristics everywhere and has both merits and defects of its own. Men, indeed, can move from district to district and employers take contracts at a distance, but the actual products of the builder's art must be raised upon the spot where they are to stand, though some of the materials and fittings—joinery, for instance—may be brought from a distance. There is, therefore, not the same constant life and death struggle as in some other cases to preserve the home market, but the trade is equally incapable of extension by export, so that a very small local depression may have a comparatively wide influence. In many cases, in that of London especially owing to the heavy expenses of production, the tendency is rather to import than export, and outlets in this respect are few and small. Again, with all the long and short-period variations that are experienced in the demand for labour, yet to a large extent this is permanent and unvarying, since many of the products of the building trade are the absolute necessities of the vast London population for its domestic life, its business, and its recreation. On the other hand, whilst the trade possesses a natural local monopoly, it is, as in the case of export and import, thrown almost entirely on its own resources. Given a change that affects the demand for labour, the possible outlets elsewhere are narrowly restricted; and given one of these that is as a matter of fact taking place, there is no resource elsewhere or in any-

thing but the revival or stimulation of local needs and the local demand. If the amount of labour required on the spot is reduced, the only means of restoring it is to increase the local demand, so that a comparatively small change may accomplish considerable effects. Those that are now taking place, and which many consider to be revolutionising the industry, will be described in this chapter.

To some extent the character of the buildings required has recently undergone a change, which has manifested itself in the requirements for various institutions, for places of amusement, and in some of the larger residences. In particular, the more altruistic motives find a different outlet, and the decline, to some extent, of the more purely religious habit, has led to a lessened demand for churches and chapels, whilst that for hospitals, schools, and institutions of various sorts is increasing. Of the former, fewer are built now; "only 70 per cent. of what there used to be fifty years ago," said the head of one firm, "the religious motive in individuals is largely dying out, replaced by the philanthropic." Again, in another sphere, the chief demand at present is for hotels and restaurants, whilst a great deal is spent upon sanitary arrangements in buildings of all sorts. Much of this change is only a transference of work from one section to another of the building trades, but it has helped on some of the wider changes that are taking place, among them the growth of specialisation, and the use of specialities, and of manufactured goods.

The most talked of and perhaps the most important of the present changes is in the methods of building construction, one that is generally associated with the name

of the ferro-concrete process. This in itself is not altogether new, though it has enjoyed a startlingly rapid development in the last few years. As much as fifty years ago flitched plates, and not long afterwards pollard iron joists, began to be used, replacing the old timber edifices. Then about twenty years since bessemer steel in the form both of stanchions and girders began to come in, followed not long afterwards by the use of coke-brize and other forms of concrete. The danger of the use of iron by itself in building construction, owing to its liability to warp in great heat, is not experienced where the steel, as in the new process, is encased in concrete, and the two together are considered to have greater resisting power than even brick or stone, and this is especially important in the case of large constructive work of all sorts. It is in the last few years that the new processes have been most in vogue, and they have been steadily growing in importance—latterly with great rapidity. Largely pioneered by the Anglo-American firm—the Waring-White Company—the process has been adopted by nearly all large contractors and in most large contracts. As much as twenty years ago, one eminent architect told me, foreseeing men could see that as distinct from joinery the carpentry trade—which is the one most affected—was doomed; and many of the types of building now in most demand give special opportunities for the use of the process. Hospitals are built that way, with the addition of special methods of fireproof construction, and garages were described as “all iron and concrete.”

Great, however, as the change has been already, the general opinion is that it has not even yet reached its

V

POSITION OF THE EMPLOYERS

BEFORE going further a review of the actual position of the employers of labour at the present time seems to be required. The real solidarity of interest between them and the men is apt, far too often, to be overlooked, but influences that bear hardly on the former, whether big contractor or small master, have their effect on enterprise, and by the check they give to it reduce the demand for labour. Not that this is always or invariably so, still less that the effect of a change is strictly proportional, affecting both employer and employed to the same extent. Both in theory and in practice a change may occur which will trench on the profits of individual firms without injuriously affecting the workmen, whilst it may even be to his advantage as where a general rise of wage-rates, enforced by trade union effort, may conceivably be simply a transfer of the profit of the capitalist to the pocket of the labourer. Conversely, there may be times when a falling-off in the demand for labour may be a blessing in disguise for those for whom it works. For instance, a time of great prosperity, when men are scarce and work is continually carried on at top speed, may produce embarrassments for the contractor from which a moderate decline and a return to more normal conditions will release him. The head

of a very large firm said of the change from the over-prosperity before the war, "Moderate prosperity produces harmony, over-prosperity brings mutual dissatisfaction, rows, slackness, wage disputes. After 1895, when the men were scarce, they would be found slacking and impudent." But, as a general rule, what affects one affects the other, even though not in strict proportion, and especially anything that checks or tends to check enterprise must inevitably have this effect. Above all, it was inevitable that a thorough and widespread depression like the present should bring about a decline of enterprise that is having a very serious effect on the hands; and the various causes which reduce the amount of work in the hands of the London employers, whether due to decreased enterprise, to a refusal to invest in building operations, or to an increase of competition, are worth studying in their direct effect on the masters, with its indirect bearing on the position of the men.

A complaint that is made by builders is of the increased speed at which work is done, and especially of its spasmodic character. For it is apt to come in a way that means a rush one day, with a large number of men on, and, a little later, a great falling-off and practically nothing going. This evil is not experienced to the same extent by firms whose demand for labour is more consistent and whose work varies less in amount from day to day or month to month. Though, therefore, they feel the effect of bad years, they are better able even then to keep a comparatively large proportion of their hands continuously employed; whilst their numbers will not increase so rapidly in very prosperous years, so that they are less likely than smaller firms to find their

market overstocked. Moreover, the depression has not produced so great a falling-off in large contracts as in smaller work. Firms working chiefly on medium-sized contracts feel this tendency to spasmodic rushes of work far more acutely, but those most affected are the small builders. Many of them employ but a few men, to whom they can only give regular work at the best of times and usually experience great day to day variations. Naturally they are affected by the increase of this tendency; whilst the rush into the trade during the prosperous years—as well to employ as to be employed—resulted in greatly augmented numbers of builders among whom to divide a decreased and decreasing amount of building.

More than anything else past over-prosperity with its corollary of over-production has had evil effects on the present position of the builder. Even now there is a great deal of work being done, especially in the suburban districts on the outskirts of London; but the good trade of a few years since not only caused in part, and in part sprang from, a readiness that no longer exists to invest in house property, but led to all sorts of speculation in new building and to every kind of contract work being carried out, so that a greater volume of work was produced than could be kept up over a series of years. The amount of work now available is, therefore, much reduced, and the inevitable reaction is being experienced. But along with this decrease in the amount of building to be done has come a very great increase in the number of competitors for it. Apparently a very popular trade with those starting in business, the building trade, it was stated before the

Labour Commission, sees more failures than any other. A large proportion of those who set up in the trade a few years ago are of that class already described whose businesses are small and their work intermittent, whilst this irregularity is increased by their great numbers. Moreover, the increase of the trade at the outskirts and outside the London area has been even greater, and on all sides competition is not merely very keen, but causes prices to be cut very fine and profits reduced almost to vanishing point. Moreover, it is not merely the small master but the large and medium contractors who are feeling the stress of suburban growth and competition, the more so since new building, as distinct from reconstruction, has come almost to a standstill in many of the boroughs of the inner ring. In large contract work the London firms find a larger and larger proportion of suburban firms able to compete with them, whilst others are less able to obtain work on the outskirts to compensate for the natural falling-off which, in addition to the depression, is decreasing demand in the centre.

The great and growing development of specialisation within the trade that has been going on for some years did not, whilst times were good, do much to prevent the large increase in the number of builders, but it is now hitting the old type of employer severely. Much work is now done in the provinces and brought up to London, and foreign importation has greatly increased.¹ It is not only that many new or special branches of work are given to firms who specialise in them, and that pro-

¹ The chief instance is joinery work; but stone is far more frequently wrought in the quarries before being brought over than before. A recent decrease due to the intense depression still leaves the amount far greater than it was previous to 1893.

cesses which replace older ones are similarly put out, but many of the new methods and processes that are helping to revolutionise the trade are being run by firms formed with the object of pushing them. Thus electrical work has in many cases been taken up as a separate trade, manufactured sanitary fittings are far more extensively used, and much house decoration has come into the hands of the West End furnishing houses. Thus it comes about that much of the repairing and renewal work that used to be given to the general builder goes elsewhere, and his new construction work is not only reduced in amount, but very much simplified. The effect, for instance, of the new ferro-concrete process has been considerable. The firms by which it was introduced have been able to extend their operations and secure an increased number of contracts; and the effect of this increase in the work of a few companies has been to still further reduce an already diminished supply of work. Most of the larger firms now carry out the process, but the prosperity and popularity of the newer firms has left a diminished demand for the rest of the market.

Moreover, apart from cyclical fluctuations and the stagnation caused by over-production in the past, a reduction of demand of a more or less permanent character is also visible, particularly in certain directions. Not only have certain portions of London become so completely covered as to leave no room for further new construction,¹ but a very large number of houses are falling empty, not merely in decaying neighbourhoods,

¹ *I.e.* building houses on sites previously vacant as opposed to pulling down and rebuilding on sites already covered—reconstruction.

but in some popular residential districts. Many even of the large residences of Park Lane or Belgravia are to let, whilst very large numbers are untenanted in boroughs like Hampstead and Marylebone. Many of them are of the type that are regularly redecorated at frequent intervals, sometimes yearly in preparation for the season, and the loss to painters is very great; and in a lesser degree carpenters, or even bricklayers, lose a considerable amount in the way of alterations, renewals, and repairs. Houses of the old-fashioned type are the most affected and the first to be affected. But this reason is not sufficient to account for the large numbers unoccupied, and the refusal to invest in house property has hindered improvement and checked reconstruction. One cause of the phenomenon is the increased facilities provided by the development of motor carriage and railways which causes the richer classes to move further afield to places outside London, whilst the heavy expenses of living in London combined with cheap fares are taking other classes away¹ to places where housing accommodation is cheaper because of lower rates and ground rents. Moreover, "bad trade with manufacturers and retailers" had produced a lessening in the demand for shops, offices, and warehouses, among other evidence of this being the continued vacancy of the Strand sites; and, further east, the depression in the Thames Ironworks has had the result of limiting work in the neighbouring districts.

Other influences act as a check on the enterprise of the

¹ Much of this, however, is not a movement from within to without the administrative county, but only from one place to another within the building trade district.

producer by rendering profits both low and uncertain. The trade has not yet recovered from the cost of the war, further amounts of capital are locked up, it is complained, by the municipalities, and lack of money puts a check on investment in house property. Dear money, especially with a 6 per cent. bank rate, as it was in the latter months of 1906, has hampered the movements of builders in general and especially of the small speculator. "Several jobs we know of," wrote one firm in November, 1906, "have been hung up to the spring of 1907 for this reason alone." To the small man working on borrowed capital dear money is fatal, since he relies on cheap borrowing, and a small return, with quick turnover of capital; but with a bank rate of this sort, meaning a still higher one in the general market, profit disappears. Further, the expenses of production in London—whether due to rates, rents, or wages—are very high, and the magnitude of the two former are generally admitted, the dispute about the rates being whether they are due to necessity or misadventure. A prominent trades unionist gave as one of the reasons why the masters are unwilling to take apprentices that "with rates and everything so high, employers have no room for learners as they want every bench to be occupied by skilled men." Many employers, great and small, speak of the heavy burden of local and general taxation: "Its incidence is so heavy that owners prefer to patch up rather than rebuild their property;" whilst it is further stated that, under present conditions, the very minimum of repairs is carried out. Rents, too, are very high, and the high rates of wages put Londoners at a further disadvantage in tendering against provincial

firms. Three advances of a halfpenny were obtained by most branches of the artisans between 1892 and 1901, raising the hourly rates from 9d. to 10½d. These advances were probably justifiable in the then state of trade, but it is sometimes felt among employers that, in the words of the Secretary to the London Master Builders, "the demand of high rates by the working classes whether trade is brisk or not" is having an evil effect. Moreover, high cost of production, meaning expensive houses, is having an unfavourable influence on the consuming power of the community. Apart from driving tenants out of London and checking demand for new and improved house-room, it compels those who remain to content themselves with inferior accommodation for a given outlay, whilst heavy rating expenses, meaning a considerable increase on the rent of a house, stimulates small cheap houses at the expense of better ones, and is apt to encourage bad buildings and jerry-builders.

The combined influence of all these causes operates in every way against the prosperity of builders of the older type. The demand has been reduced, much of their work has been seized by specialists, and the prosperity of the firms that run the new processes still further reduces their work; whilst, on the other hand, competition among the much larger number of builders within the county has been rendered still more keen by the growth of suburban firms, and the smallness of profits, dear money, and the heavy expenses of production act as a heavy check on enterprise. Further, the increase during recent years of direct employment of labour by municipalities has still further decreased the amount of

work available for the open market. Be the general merits of municipal trading what they may, its recent extension to London building at the time of a great and growing depression appears to have had a most unfortunate influence, and the unwisdom of forcing on the change at such a time and at the cost of a further discouragement of enterprise seems obvious. The whole policy of direct employment has indeed been most strongly condemned by some of the men most competent, as regards the building trade, to pass judgment. The combination of influences at work has tended to produce an almost unexampled stagnation in the trade, greater than any that has occurred for at any rate a quarter of a century, and, in spite of a slight revival for a few months of the present year, no immediate recovery is anticipated. A year ago, indeed, some of the larger builders confessed they "did not see where an improvement was to come from," and, taken as a whole, the master builders are being very hardly hit. The workmen, therefore, inevitably suffer as badly, if not worse, for, like their masters, they find their trade overstocked with a diminished amount to be done, demand for labour falling off almost as much as its supply has increased. This, indeed, is not one of those occasions when the men escape from what injures the masters; but, on the contrary, the stagnation is one of those that affects both employers and employed alike with an almost unexampled severity.

VI

CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT WITHIN THE YEAR

APART from quasi-permanent and from long-period variations in the demand for labour in these trades, we have to consider another type of periodic changes which work themselves out within the limits of a single year, as the result of influences causing the volume of employment to fluctuate from month to month; and these tendencies to long- and to short-period variations react and interact upon one another. Those we have now to consider are generally known as "seasonal," but this definition confuses more or less distinct ideas. The purely "seasonal" changes brought about by weather and temperature tend to make work less possible and less convenient at certain periods, acting often indirectly through a rise in price; but there is another set of tendencies which are due to social changes and the result of public convenience, of fashion, and of society—in the narrower sense of the word. They operate indirectly through the volume of demand, rather than directly through its price, in different months; and we must distinguish meteorological from social causes of change, and for brevity may distinguish them as seasonal and quasi-seasonal.

Of the former the most important influence is that of frost, potentially as well as actually, since the fear of it may help to delay the commencement of a job. Its affect as a whole is obviously in proportion to the severity of the weather, and is greater therefore in the more northern portions of the British Isles. The series of hard winters which came to an end with that of 1894-1895 had a proportional influence on employment as was shown before the Labour Commission in 1892. "The proportion of playtime in winter depends on the severity of the weather; last winter (1891-1892) there was a lot," said a representative of the Ashton-under-Lyne bricklayers; whilst another witness (Leeds stonemasons) said there was "a great deal of irregularity of employment from seasonal causes: seven weeks this year owing to frost of which there was a great deal down yonder. Seasonal variations are due to winter weather." But the marked change in this respect since 1895 has greatly reduced the direct influence of frost; and the opinion was expressed to me that, except in painting, "the seasonal character of the trade is not so great as it was, and frost is not so serious as formerly." How far this is so, and how far it is simply the result of a better understanding of the means by which stoppages can be prevented, is a matter of opinion. The informant just quoted thought the use of cement for mortar had much to do with the change. Before the Committee on Distress from Want of Employment in 1895, Mr. Ernest Aves quoted evidence to show that work could be done in winter if more care were taken without necessarily incurring greater expense, and gave instances of jobs

being carried through in quite severe weather. In some cases, indeed, it may be found more convenient to go on than to stop; and during the past winter, perhaps the most severe of recent years, stoppages for frost do not appear to have been very great—a fortnight for instance in one case and a week in another.

Frost, however, is not the only seasonal influence, although the most important. Heavy rain will stop bricklayers, painters, and those stonemasons who are engaged on the building, although the latter will sometimes return to the yard during its continuance. House-breakers, too, cannot continue owing to the danger of accidents. Plasterers and painters are delayed by damp; and fogs, dark days, and short hours all produce inconvenience. Rain indeed may injure trade at any time; but in summer it is more likely to cause delays and stoppages than to check demand. But the combined influence of winter conditions, even apart from frost, take effect in causing such work as conveniently can to be postponed. It results, therefore, that convenience rather than necessity will often dictate a winter slackening of employment, as will appear more clearly when we consider the various effects of varying causes on different types of building.

It is the existence of quasi-seasonal changes in demand, such as those produced by holiday times and the movements of society, that explains why variations in employment within the year are not to be accounted for by these purely seasonal influences alone, which would tend to produce long even variations over the whole year. In the United Kingdom¹ as a whole, indeed,

¹ Note.—The following are the averages month by month for the

such variations are found, but the measure and method of those we are about to describe are to some extent peculiar to London. For the four winter months, not only are the purely meteorological influences operating most effectively, but the fact that London is full for the winter season which reaches its height after Christmas causes all the purely social tendencies to have free play, especially since all immediately necessary work will have already been carried out in anticipation. But from the end of February a movement in demand—vulgarly called “spring cleaning”—~~sets in and~~ becomes brisk, as many kinds of work are carried out in preparation for the summer season. Instead of improving slowly, therefore, as it would do if purely seasonal causes alone were at work, trade grows rapidly brisker throughout March and reaches its spring zenith about the end of April. It is apt to be rather less good in May and business decreases as town fills up. The improvement in new construction work is more than counterbalanced by the falling-off in other kinds, and June, with, sometimes, July as well, is the slack summer season. With the holidays, however, trade revives during August and September. A large amount of work that must be done when houses are more or less empty is then carried out, whilst at the same time work

thirteen years (1894 to 1906) as given in the *Labour Gazette* for the United Kingdom as a whole and for London:—

United Kingdom.

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
5.7	5.4	4.3	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.9	4.2	5.5

London.

5.4	5.1	4.2	3.7	3.8	4.4	4.1	2.6	3.3	4.4	4.8	5.4
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These figures are those of all the trade unions making returns in each case.

upon new buildings reaches its maximum. Moreover, preparations are being made for a long winter, not a short summer, season. In good years trade may remain brisk for part or even the whole of November; but in more normal times the decline sets in before October closes; and of the winter months December and January are the worst, since things often begin to revive before the end of February.

These monthly changes are well illustrated by the reports of the Labour Correspondent to the Board of Trade, and those for 1894 may bear quoting, since trade was then neither extremely brisk nor unduly depressed. Allowance must be made for the fact that for some reason trade in November was better than in October. In January there was no great change after some seasonal decline in December, 1893. February saw "Some improvement in most branches," which was maintained, except with plumbers, in March, and continued with the same exception in April. In May there was little change, in June a falling-off, followed by a slight improvement on the whole in July, which was well maintained in August. There was a slight falling-off in the numbers employed in September, and some seasonal decline in October, but an improvement in November, especially with carpenters and plumbers, and then again, in December, a decline, mainly seasonal.¹

We must now, in order to understand the effects of these various influences, consider them in connection with different kinds of building work. In many large

¹ The percentages of unemployed for each month were as follows:—

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
6.0	5.5	5.0	4.3	4.5	5.6	4.7	2.8	3.8	4.9	4.0	5.6

contracts the work has to go on continuously once it has begun, and there is very little choice as to the season in which it shall be carried out. Many of them, too, are of the nature of "bespoke" work, and the building, and restoration, of schools and churches, and public work generally, are often begun and completed as necessity dictates. Where, moreover, the building is to be used for purposes of profit-making, or a quick return on capital is required, it will often be advantageous to start and carry through the job as early as possible. An employer, engaged chiefly on big contracts, told me that with him "winter slackness consisted rather in shortness of hours than in dismissal of hands, except in the case of a four or five weeks' frost." Such tendencies to equalise demand for labour are generally found in most contracts of any considerable size, but are more potent in the case of the larger ones, and, roughly speaking, tendencies to variation are in inverse proportion to the size of the contract. Where it is likely to last a year or more, they are reduced to a minimum; but with rather smaller ones, it becomes possible to carry through the work in the more desirable months. But even here public convenience will often require an immediate start rather than a delay till a more favourable season arrives. "Contracts do not begin at one time rather than another," a big contractor's foreman told me, "but are started just as is convenient." Moreover, whilst the employer will weigh the advantages of keeping good men regularly employed by distributing his work throughout the year against any possible seasonal disadvantages, the large speculative builder, the man who opens up the wealthier residential

districts, will have to consider further that in the spring the "letting" capacity of houses and shops is greater. At the same time, it would be a mistake to neglect the fact that where a contract can be carried out between spring and autumn, such opportunities will often be utilised in the interests either of the employer, of the individual consumer, or of the general public, especially where rapidity of execution from start to finish, once the work is begun, is the foremost consideration, but delay in starting it is more or less immaterial. In the case of the redecoration of the reading room at the British Museum, for instance, the longer daylight and longer working hours of summer help to limit the time during which the room is closed, and to limit it to that time of year when the public use of it is least. Whilst, therefore, the general influence of large and medium contracts and contractors is as a whole towards the regularising of employment, there is yet a certain tendency, small in the larger, but greater among the less large, towards differentiation in favour of the summer months. In proportion to the whole amount of such work the total is no doubt comparatively small, and though not negligible, the variations in contracts are by no means the chief cause of fluctuations in employment from month to month.

So far as new construction is concerned, the greatest variations are brought about by the building of small houses by small men, where special influences are at work; and it is the combination of this kind of work and this type of builder that is usually held chiefly responsible for seasonal changes; and the same thing may be said of small contracts generally. In the words

of the Secretary to the London Master Builders' Association: "The cause of seasonal fluctuations is mostly in small contracts which will always be taken on in summer, with fine weather and long hours." And the small builder is peculiarly susceptible to such influences, for he does not usually possess a large capital. So far, too, as new houses of this sort, especially those suitable for the working classes, are concerned, any special demand would occur in the late summer and early autumn months, when the prospective tenant is more likely to be in a position to take a better house and to bear the probably greater expense of travelling further to his work. Moreover, scarcity of capital and the usually small margin of profit are important in causing the small builder to work chiefly in the long, light summer days, since a rapid turnover of his capital is essential and anything which may hinder the work or increase its cost must be avoided. Bad weather and general dampness prevent, better light and longer days assist, speed and cheapness; and in these respects even a wet summer may be better than a winter. These considerations apply more especially to those cases where the employer is able to ignore the London rules as to overtime. As regards other small contracts, every opportunity to carry them out in the summer will exist, though a certain number will have to be done as the need arises. They may, however, be regarded as coming largely under the influences of those classes of work we have still to consider.

The influences that we have found to be at work so far have been to a great extent of a purely seasonal character; but in those classes of work which remain, those

which lead towards other regular, though non-seasonal, variations within the year, are far more prominent. For repairs and decorations, and renewals and additions, show more tendency to fluctuate from month to month than any other kind of building work; though even here no small proportion of the work will have to be done as the need arises and so far tends to be averaged over the year. In the case of repairs and decorations, a great deal is needed, in preparation for the London season, in March, April, and the first half of May. Much of the decoration that is then carried out is of an annual recurrence—many of the larger mansions being regularly redecorated every year, and most of the somewhat smaller houses in the residential suburbs less frequently and less completely, but generally about the same time. Shops and, to a lesser degree, public houses follow the same course; and it is a common complaint that it is impossible to get good painters in April. August, too, has its full share of such work, since the summer holidays enable all schools, clubs, and offices to be thoroughly overhauled. Secondly, more permanent changes—alterations, additions, renewals—whether in places of residence or of business, have to be done as far as possible in the summer time, the necessity of getting through the work quickly constituting the first, and that a seasonal, disadvantage against the winter: and this affects all small contracts more or less. But the more social influences operate even more powerfully, since such work needs an empty town even more than repairs and decorations do. Moreover, whilst in residences additions will usually be made in anticipation either of the summer or the winter season, in places of business

not only will this be true, but trade is seldom as slack in the spring as in the late summer, and the more permanent alterations will tend to be put off till the latter, thus helping to make August and September busier than March and April.

Most of the sections of the building trade are affected more or less by these quasi-seasonal influences, but it will be worth while to illustrate the effect of all causes, seasonal and quasi-seasonal alike, by quoting the description given to me of the work of a skilled decorator, painting and decorating being admittedly a seasonal trade, whatever opinions may be held as to the rest of the group. "About mid-February things begin to become brisk. They improve quickly until they are very busy in the spring season, March and April. Trade is good in May, but becomes slacker towards the end of the month, though it does sometimes remain brisk even after June has begun. By this time, however, the skilled man and the man in the know would be moving to the suburbs, to country houses, and to the seaside. Again in August, September, and part of October town empties and the clubs and schools are done up, and in good years work is plentiful all through October and for the first part of November. Finally, from November to February comes the slack season." In the case of the ordinary brush hand, however, things would be less good than this. "We have a slack time in the summer," said a witness before the Royal Commission on Labour. "This is due to fashion, custom, and the employers' convenience. . . . The employee does not wish to be slack, but is so much more than absolutely necessary and artificially in summer."

These tendencies appear not only in the case of painters, where the variations within the year are greatest, but in that of the carpenters and joiners, though in a far more normal and less violent form; and the latter are in some respects the most steadily employed section of the trade.

The results of the foregoing survey, therefore, suggest caution in any treatment of seasonal variations in the London building trades. The tendency ~~over the whole~~ country is still that which Mr. Llewellyn Smith described to the Committee on Distress from Want of Employment in 1895, namely, a tendency to a long even variation within the year. Comparatively high percentages are found for January and February, then there is a sharp fall to April, after which there is very little variation till the end of September. Then there is a gradual rise to the end of November and a sharp one in December.¹ In London, however, thanks to the operation of powerful quasi-seasonal influences, the unemployment curve resembles a zig-zag; and there would be some truth in ascribing the variations to the existence of a few particularly prosperous months, rather than to a winter decline; and, as a matter of fact, June and July stand about half way between the busiest and the slackest months, and, on the average for the last thirteen years, have nearly the same percentages of unemployed as October and March respectively. The degree of variation is determined by the fact of the co-operation,

¹ The estimated averages for all the percentages given by the Board of Trade from 1894 to 1906, upon which the above description is based, are:—

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
5.7	5.4	4.3	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.9	4.2	5.5

or non-co-operation, of seasonal with quasi-seasonal causes. In the winter they combine to reduce the demand for labour, whilst in June and July seasonal causes alone would tend to increase that demand, but are more than outweighed by the quasi-seasonal. Again, in March and April new construction will increase comparatively slowly, but some other kinds of work will be extremely brisk; whilst in August and September both sets of tendencies co-operate to make the demand for labour approach a maximum. Above all, it is necessary to remember that we are dealing with several variable, and not one uniform, influence. General winter conditions and, to a certain extent, public convenience put the winter months at a disadvantage compared with even the slackest periods of summer; whilst private and social influences tend to render mid-summer as well as mid-winter less busy than the spring and late summer. Finally, one must not forget that if there are many tendencies to variation, there are others making for regularity from month to month, and the effects of London conditions and of the recent periods of inflation and contraction in the trade must be allowed for.

The influence of long-period, or as they are usually called cyclical, variations upon those that we are now considering is by no means negligible. During the later 'nineties the amount of unemployment even in the worst months was so small as to leave little room for variations in the better ones; and such as they were, these changes were probably due more to quasi-seasonal causes, so that in 1896 June had the highest percentage, the same as that of January and December, and again

in 1897, when its figures were only equalled by those of the latter month. Employers were often hung up for lack of men; and as one man told me, "You did not have to go and look for a job, but as soon as you had finished one some one came and asked you to take another." This would, however, apply rather to the higher types of workmen represented by the trades unions' returns than to the more casualised classes. But in the last few years the severe depression appears to have had an exactly opposite effect to that just described. I was told that "it is the shortage of small building work that is responsible for the present depression;" and whilst the greatness of the demand in the times of prosperity enabled the small builder to neglect the considerations that usually tend to reduce winter work, the recent depression has had the effect, not only of limiting the amount of work done, but of causing the fullest use to be made of the seasonal advantages of summer. That this effect has not been greater than it is, is due to the fact (mentioned in a previous chapter) that London is the seat of government and the headquarters of commerce. The result of this is a large demand for labour to satisfy the needs of, *inter alia*, the central and local authorities and various public and quasi-public bodies. In spite of some falling-off, therefore, of trade with manufacturers and retailers and of a reduction in the demand for new places of business, such as offices and warehouses, the amount of large building¹ in course of construction is under the circumstances extraordinarily large, and as this is the type of

¹ It is not maintained that there has been no falling-off, but that it has been less than the falling-off in other work.

work where the employment of labour is most constant from month to month, the tendencies to increase variations within the year has to some extent been counteracted.

It remains, however, to distinguish between the different sections of the trade in relation to the extent to which they are affected by these various seasonal and quasi-seasonal influences. The painters, as we have seen, suffer from both somewhat acutely; and the secretary of their most important union summed up the situation that "even in the best of years there are some bad months; and in the worst some months when there is plenty of work going on." The carpenters and joiners are affected by both tendencies, but in a more normal fashion; and the plumbers' figures follow the same course with some modifications. Winter conditions and especially frost tend in their case to increase the amount of work available and, probably for this reason, the figures for December and January are lower than those of November and February. The busy season in the spring is shorter and there is comparatively little difference between the three slack summer months.¹ Bricklayers are perhaps more affected by winter conditions than any other section of the trade, and are particularly susceptible to changes in the amount of smaller building on hand. They are also affected, though not

¹ The figures for the carpenters and joiners and plumbers have only been given separately in recent years. The average month by month for the five years (1902 to 1906) is given below:—

Carpenters and Joiners.											
Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
8.2	7.1	5.9	5.9	6.0	7.2	6.4	4.6	5.8	7.6	8.5	9.2
Plumbers.											
11.7	12.5	11.7	9.6	11.2	10.9	11.0	7.5	8.7	10.9	12.7	12.3

perhaps to the same extent as the trades already mentioned, by quasi-seasonal causes. They are, therefore, more susceptible to a winter decline which is greater in their case than in that of other sections, but employment remains steadier throughout the summer. Masons, though apt to be severely hit by a really hard winter, are much more regularly employed, as they are mostly engaged on large contract work where the fluctuations will be smallest. Plasterers too, though more often engaged in small work, and though liable to be stopped both by frost and damp, will also, so far at any rate as a single year is concerned, enjoy more regular employment. Both these two latter sections, moreover, are less affected by repairs and renewals, and such work will in their case be liable to be more evenly extended over the whole year than in the case of some other branches. Many labourers will enjoy the same conditions as the skilled men to whom they are attached, but it is the labourers and painters who suffer most acutely from generally casual and irregular employment.

Before concluding this chapter it is necessary to point out that caution is required in dealing with the trades union returns of unemployment. For, in the first place, they are only provided by certain unions, where the variations from month to month are comparatively moderate, and none are made by such unions as the Operative Bricklayers where they would probably be greater. Secondly, neither the trades unions nor the employers' returns take account of the large mass of casualised labour that is found in some parts of London. The men so situated are often distinguished as the chronically unemployed, and are generally found hang-

EMPLOYMENT IN EACH MONTH

London Building Trade, according to Returns made to the Board of Trade.

August September October November December

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ing on to the many small employers, often little more than master workmen, who have only sufficient capital to do the small jobbing work of their own neighbourhoods. Such employment is even in the best years and in the best seasons of a very casual and irregular character, whilst in the winter it becomes very scarce indeed. As we have seen, the tendency to seasonal variations is often in inverse proportion to the magnitude of the work undertaken, and casual employment and seasonal unemployment appear to go hand in hand. Among this unfortunate class of men, the chief elements are builders' labourers, handymen, often half-trained carpenters or bricklayers, and semi-skilled painters. The number of men who claimed to belong to the more skilled sections is relatively small, especially that of plasterers, masons, and plumbers. The amount of labour affected by "seasonal" influences is therefore much greater than if we considered the better-trained and organised workers alone; and it is when casual and generally irregular conditions of employment go hand in hand with them that the evil is greatest. Among the better type of workmen, painters and possibly bricklayers excepted, this particular evil, great though it is, is not perhaps so great as is usually supposed, whilst, as we have shown, it is the result of far more complex conditions than are usually recognised. The general question of irregular employment and of loss of time between one job and another must be left to a later chapter, as must the fuller discussion of the question as to how far the problem is one of seasonal only and how far one of general irregularity.

VII

GENERAL IRREGULARITY AND ITS RESULTS

IN addition to the tendencies we have just been considering, there are in some trades fluctuations in employment over even shorter periods which often cause the individual man to find his work irregular from day to day and week to week, and the general conditions under which a trade is carried on will exert a vast influence in this direction. Those peculiar to the building trade have helped especially to produce a system of casual labour, quite apart from the results of those more calculable and consistent causes hitherto considered. The general organisation of the trade is largely responsible for thus producing greater natural irregularity over a given volume of work than in some other trades, the contract system and the method of taking on and discharging men being of paramount importance.

In this connection it is interesting to contrast the conditions obtaining under the system of contract and tender in the building trade with those of factory industry. In the latter there is usually a more or less assured market, and though there are busy seasons and slack seasons, orders flow in and out with some approach to regularity. Vicissitudes such as they are will generally operate consistently over the whole field, and the

same things, whether one commodity or a number of commodities, will be manufactured day by day, year in and year out. One factory will make one line of goods, another a different one; but there will be no chopping and changing from one to another. But with some exceptions the builder under the contract system finds his work varying in kind as well as in amount within comparatively short periods. The method in operation is as follows:—When buildings of any sort are required, or any work connected with them has to be done, the work is put up to tender. Either it is publicly advertised and free to any builder who likes to put in an estimate for it, or sometimes the architect selects certain firms who are invited to tender for it. As a rule the lowest tender is accepted, but sometimes the middle tender or some other is preferred at the discretion of the architect. This system leads to many fluctuations in the amount of work a firm has on hand, and therefore the number of employees it can take on. It also causes many changes in the numbers of each section of the trade who are employed. Everything, therefore, combines to hinder many employers from keeping a number of men steadily and regularly employed.

In the first place, the complaint that work comes in rushes is commonly heard, and that whilst a very large number of hands are needed on one day, very few are required a little later. This, too, appears to be of more frequent occurrence now, and is no doubt partly due to seasonal and other causes. But the influence of the contract system is greatest as regards, at any rate, the fortunes of individual firms, the amount of business done depending on success or failure in the obtaining of

contracts. These variations, too, are likely to be more pronounced when the number of firms engaged in the trade is as large as it is to-day and prices are cut so closely. The result is that even when the amount of work in the whole market remains the same over a long period, there are constant little variations among individual firms. The general level is the same whilst the waves constantly rise above and fall below it. One contractor gets much work and for the time being takes on many men, whilst another is doing very little; then not long afterwards the conditions are reversed, the busy man becomes slack and the slack busy, and this is constantly taking place all over London all through the year. The general level is more or less consistent, and its variations are so too, but individual levels change persistently, some moving in one direction and others in another. Men are taken on for a contract and put off at the end of it, and are off to look for another job. In the result, as things are now, we shall find that this often means a number of men half-employed through the absence of means of co-ordinating the general demand for labour.

Secondly, not only does the amount of work done by particular firms vary, but its kind varies also from contract to contract; so that in many cases, even where an individual employer has the same number of men at work for a long period, this number may be split up in various ways among the various trades according to the character of the contract. For the generality of firms tender for every variety of contract, and employ men according to the requirements of each. There are, of course, a good many exceptions.

Some of the very large firms confine themselves chiefly to large contracts, and engage men in much the same proportions from job to job, whilst many firms make specialities of various branches of the trade and so draw their men almost entirely from one or two sections. But the vast majority of firms scarcely know, from contract to contract, how many men of each branch of the trade they will have on. Even in constructive work the proportions will vary with the type of building raised, and repairing work will provide even greater differences. The restoration of a church will need, chiefly, masons, bricklayers, and labourers; that of a mansion, painters, plasterers, and perhaps carpenters; sanitary requirements will introduce a number of plumbers; and so from job to job the proportions vary. One builder told me, indeed, that he could never give any idea of the numbers of men employed from one branch or another, since they varied so largely and continuously; and the difficulty of keeping men on continuously over anything approaching a long period is proportionately increased.

The contract system, therefore, requires a continual taking on and discharging of fresh men by the employers in answer to the almost continual variation in the numbers; and the tendency to irregularity thus created is increased by the naturally haphazard way in which men find work and employers men. This is generally known by the name of the "calling-round" system. The workman, in need of work, calls at the various shops and jobs where work is or is likely to be carried on and where hands are thought to be needed and presents himself to the foreman, who is responsible for taking on and discharging men. If there is a vacancy and the

applicant can satisfy him that he is competent he is taken on; if not, he walks on to the next shop, and so on until he can get employed. No character is asked or given, and one would be refused if asked for; and a man's chances depend solely on his ability to satisfy the foreman as to his capacity. On his part the foreman, if in need of men, often waits for hands to call, "the first man who does so being taken on provided he is satisfactory," or he may go to the yard gates and whistle, and select the first man who turns up. This is the working of the system in its crudest form, for in practice it is widely modified on both sides. Often the foreman will have to select from a crowd of men, and, after selecting the men he knows, will be reduced to picking the most likely looking, and especially so when a number of men have to be taken on in a hurry. Then as soon as the job is over, the workman packs up and is off to look for another job, whilst when a new one begins the foreman selects his men as before. The engagement is terminable at an hour's notice on either side, and so if the man sees a way to better himself, or the foreman can get a superior man, it is easily done.

In spite of one or two obvious defects, the hour's notice is perhaps the fairest system available. It gives little security for regular employment to the workman, and may expose him to arbitrary and unfair action on the part of the foreman; but the character of the trade makes it necessary to take on and put off men at short notice, and, as men are now engaged, it enables incompetent and undesirable employees to be got rid of quickly. The workman, moreover, in order to find a new job as each one closes, is compelled to be always on the move,

and the existing system enables him to get a new one as soon as, or even before, the one he is engaged on ends, whilst he is able to leave one he does not like, or one that is likely to be short for one that will last longer. A painter in reference to this said: "It gives great opportunities for favouritism, but is also of use to the men; a man whose job is ending in two or three days will meet some mates on a new job of three weeks or a month. They take him with them next day and he may give notice or he may not, just walking up on Saturday for his money."

The charge of favouritism and unfairness is often made against the foremen, but though this sometimes occurs, it is not the scandal it once was.¹ Probably it is chiefly confined to the smaller firms. The man just quoted said that the foreman "may pick up in the pub or elsewhere a number of friends. They may be good men or bad; may be butchers or bakers or anything; and foremen have been known to discharge good hands for such, which tells very hard on good men who follow the shop." Again, it is sometimes said that they are very easily induced to give any one a trial, especially when work is simple like that of outside painters. Though, however, there is room for improvement where such

¹ Mr. F. A. Moore's evidence before the Labour Commission. "I have known, and I think no man who understands the London trade can contradict me, a foreman in an underhand way accept payments for keeping on inferior workmen from these very men. I have known foremen bring up young men from the country, place them in large shops at good wages, and then at the end of the week accept privately a 'hand-over' of 4s. or 5s. from these men for keeping them on constantly at the expense of good and skilled men. I say it is notorious in the trade. It is a matter of rare occurrence now because employers have become thoroughly wide-awake owing to closures and disclosures. The practice has prevailed in London, but both sides being now thoroughly wide-awake it has died out."

things occur, they are not of common occurrence and are practically unknown among the more responsible men employed by the biggest firms; and it would not be easy for the masters, occupied as they are with other parts of the business, to take over from the foremen the task of engaging men. "The employer nowadays has no time to devote to his men, but transacts his business largely with the foreman who knows the capacities of the various workmen; but the employers speaking generally do not. The foreman has this knowledge or he would not be fit for his business" (Evidence before the Labour Commission: Mr. F. A. Moore); and a large employer of labour told me that "his foremen always knew where to go and pick up men; he had very little casual picking up of men." A more important objection is the changes in the ranks of foremen brought about by death or removal. "When men follow up a foreman and he dies or retires, new ones are taken on who are followed by a lot of new men." Nor is there always complete co-ordination even among those in a single firm. "One of the difficulties with the general foremen is that you might apply to a man and get a job. The next job there would be another foreman and you might not be taken." Still, though the changes among the masters are less frequent, and though in some respects improvement is possible, in the direction of making the taking on of some of the men less casual, and in sending on men who are no longer wanted by one foreman to the other foreman in the firm's service,¹ yet on

¹ It is only fair to remember that in many cases the men are not of sufficient ability or industry to be thus privileged; for a man may be good enough to take on for a single job, but not to be kept on permanently.

the whole the system turns out well, and no better one has yet been suggested to take its place.

Generally speaking, however, the foremen in obtaining men, and at any rate the better class of men in searching for work, act in a far more systematic manner than the sketch just given of the general system would lead one to suppose. The foremen, especially where a large number of men have to be put on at short notice, often have very little choice as to how they engage them, and often get a very mixed lot. But generally they have a number of old hands who follow the firm, and a list of the best men to whom they write when they require them. Many of them get to know the men very thoroughly, can separate the good from the bad among those who call round for work,¹ get in touch with skilled men, and know where to find them at need. A competent foreman, therefore, can practically always keep his staff up to the required standard of efficiency.

Similarly with the men a systematic replaces a casual search for work. They learn in various ways—through friends, through talk in the dinner hour, through branch meetings of the unions, or in other ways—what jobs are on or are likely to be started, and take pains to learn how long a particular job will last, and to get another as soon as or even before it ends. The movements of foremen are kept in view, and he has plenty of old hands about him by the time he is ready to start. Many of the older men, indeed, have quite a big connection of this sort; but the younger men have to call round and take their chance until they get known, but as foremen are

¹ One told me: "I have men calling and get to know them. There are men I would take at once if they called, and hundreds whom I would not look at."

always on the look-out for smart and promising youngsters, one of this sort can soon get taken on, even on the best jobs. Use, in many cases, is made of the trades unions, for a man on putting his name down at a branch has all the members of that branch on the look-out for a job for him; and sometimes the unions give a small *douceur*—usually 6d.—for every unemployed member taken off the books. Application, too, is sometimes made to them by masters and foremen in need of men; but this is of less frequent occurrence in London than in some other places. It is sometimes said that the really competent man does not want the help of the unions; “he does not require any leaning tower to be leaning on; he can find these things for himself;” and whatever the defects of the system are, perhaps because of them, the best men can usually get along as regards work and in other ways.

The system we have just described, however, even in its best development, has a most distinct and unfortunate tendency towards irregularity of employment. “Work is essentially discontinuous in character though the demand is local and comparatively constant from year to year. Employment and unemployment tend to be discontinuous, and are in no sense fixed quantities;” and making all allowances for cases where the supply of work is steady, the difficulty of regularising the demand for labour is often insuperable. “It is always to the employer’s interest,” Mr. (now Sir J. M.) Burt told the Labour Commission, “to keep a number of regular men at work, because thus he is able to select his men and to keep good men constantly employed;” but he added, “A builder would often like to regulate his work, but it

is out of his power to do so." Sometimes, indeed, the high cost of labour in London, coupled with the limited efficiency of casual and often half-trained labour, makes it more profitable to take men on for, and put them off after, a short period.¹ In many cases, however, such regularisation is possible, in part or in whole, and it would give a false impression of the actual condition of the trade to lose sight of these.

Many of the larger firms, especially when they are able to get a series of big contracts extending over many months or more, even up to a couple of years, do possess a very large staff of regular workers. Unlike the small builder who is not so fortunately situated, such masters are more able to suit their own convenience in undertaking, in beginning, and in finishing contracts, and are, moreover, often able to equalise more or less their demand for labour over a series of years. "We have experienced," one of them told me, "very little of that casual picking up of men. Our foremen always know where to find them; and even unskilled labourers are taken on over and over again." ~~And one of these foremen said that once a man taken on by them had proved himself a competent and steady workman he could assure himself of an almost permanent job.~~ "Unless we are very slack we do not put off men, and never without sending them to other foremen to see if work

¹ Another practical difficulty was given by another witness of the London Master Builders, Mr. Stanley Bird:—"Our workmen are a class of men who move about the country very much, and as soon as one job is finished they go to another; we lose all knowledge of them and frequently are not able to identify them again."

Mr. Ottey, Secretary to the Operative Plasterers' Society, said:—"Our work is very irregular. You simply finish a job. Then you are off and work for some other employer."

can be found for them." Some of the men had been with the firm fifteen, others eight or ten years, and often changes would be due to the convenience or pleasure of the men themselves. Even in these cases, however, there will be certain jobs for which men will be needed only for shorter periods, and various supernumeraries will be taken on and discharged as they are required.¹

More frequent than these cases, however, are those where a permanent staff is kept to form the nucleus of the firm's workers, as is often done even by the comparatively small shops. "There is a certain class of men generally attached to this work, and the employers do as much as they can to keep their regulars employed and together. Then there is a floating surplus which moves about from shop to shop."² In many cases the permanent staff is kept on continuously and extra men put on in busy times, and barring special circumstances or accidents, the former are little affected by changes in demand, though the number of supernumeraries varies widely. All such arrangements may, of course, be upset by a depression like the present. "To our knowledge," said one firm, "there are now several good men who have worked for us for years looking for work;" and another, a smaller firm, saw "little likelihood of employment during the winter (1906-1907) even for its regular hands." But even in very small shops there are often

¹ In his evidence before the House of Commons Committee on Distress from Want of Employment (1895), Mr. Ernest Aves gave an example of another class of shop, where this is done:—"It is far more common where employers have to send men to jobs in private houses to have a permanent staff who can be moved about, while the individual man receives more regular employment."

² Evidence of Mr. Knox, Secretary to the National Association of Master Builders, before the Labour Commission. The reference is to Liverpool, but would apply equally well to London.

a few men on continuously, whilst others are employed off and on. Thus, at the worst of times, and even with a trade like that of the painters which is of a marked seasonal character, a certain proportion are always in regular work. The secretary of their union mentioned a branch where not half a dozen men were out, though he held this to be the worst winter on record.¹ "Even now," he said, "I know hundreds of men who have not had a day out except through their own fault or pleasure, even when the depression was at its height. The big decorating shops will have, say, 200 to 300 men on in the worst, and perhaps 1000 in the best, of times."

Further, many of these men who get regular employment are not attached permanently to one single firm, but move about from shop to shop and so get practically continuous work. Two of the younger men, one a carpenter and the other a stonemason, told me they had never been out of a job since they took up the trade. The former said that he had been very lucky in getting jobs of twelve months' duration and so on, and the latter said that all the time he had ever lost had been a few days from frost. In short, in whatever way it is obtained, whether permanently with a single firm or through a continuous succession of jobs, the best class of mechanic, exceptional causes apart, can always get work. Where the shoe pinches is that irregularity of employment affect men of a far better class in the building trade than in most others. Not only does casual labour tend to increase and widen the fringe of idle and incompetent who are usually out of a job, but it prevents many good average working men and honest citizens

¹ The remarks quoted were made to me on January 16, 1907.

from obtaining really continuous employment. The system has certain characteristics and defects of its own which produce this result.

Requiring as it does, but only partially obtaining, a labour supply of very great mobility, the building trade offers a curious commentary on the theory of the mobility of labour. Such mobility sufficient for the purposes of the individual is often displayed by the most competent; but for the purposes of finding continuous employment, qualities are needed in which many of the men are lacking—knowledge of the conditions of employment, and jobs going on, not only in the immediate neighbourhood, but further afield, resource in order to search with effect, and energy to start upon this without delay at the close of a job. Many men, indeed, so regulate their search as not to lose more than a week or two between each job; but lower than this, there is a state of things where the search is without system or method, and, a few of the nearest and most available sources being exhausted, the workman finds himself utterly at a loss. The result is the growth of a large fringe of casual labourers, picking up work at intervals and living a hand-to-mouth existence. Among some less desirable elements are many honest, steady citizens who have drifted somehow or other into this situation, and who have not the means or the power—with the present excess of labour—of improving their position. The “floating surplus” has failed to adjust itself completely to the requirements of the various firms, and so a reserve of labour, yearly growing larger, has come into being.

It is possible, however, to exaggerate the failure to

present depression and by the tendency of depressions to lead to its increase. Still more does the general prevalence of casual labour in the trade¹ account for the unwelcome pre-eminence; and another cause will have to be considered more fully, namely, the way in which the trade acts as what Mr. Ernest Aves has called "the dustbin of national industry."

Owing to the very free-and-easy and often haphazard way in which men are selected for employment, and to the fact that often, where men have to be taken on in a hurry in large numbers, a means for a nice discrimination does not exist, the trade especially in some branches is open to any one, and the work is often such as any one can perform after a fashion. This is especially the case with those sections already mentioned as particularly overrun with casual labour. Furthermore, the combination of high hourly rates of wages and short hours not only leads to a free-and-easy method of living, but is an incentive to all who have no desire for steady regular work to enter the trade. Very little skill is needed, for every one can paint and much of the labouring work is of the simplest; yet painters usually get from 7½d. to 8½d. an hour, and labourers 7d. an hour, meaning from 31s. 3d. to 35s. in the one case and 29s. 2d. in the other for fifty hours' work a week, which compares favourably with from 22s. to 25s. and the very long hours that are the lot, for instance, of the casual carman. Since, too, the labour supply has been regulated by the dock companies, the openings in that direction have

¹ When working for the Stepney Distress Committee I found that a number of men, evidently very casually employed, stated, in this and one or two other trades, that work was no worse than usual and that they were as well off as usual.

been limited; and, as a consequence, these branches¹ of the building trades are swelled by labour of all sorts.

First, there are the failures of other trades to whom these are the most available openings, and complaints are numerous as to the presence of "butchers and bakers," of "tram-conductors," of "coachmen," and of various other men who get their living through painting. A more legitimate invasion is that of discharged soldiers and sailors, who, in default of something better, invariably find their way into the painting and labouring branches of the trade. These are further recruited by those who in youth have failed to learn a trade, preferring immediate high wages as errand boys or in ropeworks. Too often one can trace the evolution of the "builder's labourer," working as a newsboy or an errand boy, then as messenger boy or in ropeworks, then taking other jobs as he gets too old for these, till finally, usually between the ages of 20 and 25, he becomes a casual labourer in the building trade. But even more deleterious than this gravitation of the untrained and the incompetent in this direction is the invasion of the trade by those who do not want to get more than casual and intermittent labour. To the drunkard and the lazy, painting especially offers the best available chance of good pay and little work. So complete, indeed, is the chain of connection between the fully-employable and the unemployable that we get men who will work a few weeks and then stay out a few

¹ The Secretary of the Amalgamated House and Ship Painters and Decorators estimated that the number of *bond-fide* painters in London was from 30,000 to 40,000 [the census in 1900 gave 35,974], and that the men who somehow or other made a livelihood at it came to something like 100,000.

to enjoy the proceeds and men who will work a few days in every week but who will not do a full week, long before we get to the totally unemployable. The prevalence of wives' and children's earnings, too, enables the husband to loaf and work at his own sweet will; and one builder noted the habit of "coming to earn a drink," that is, working for a few hours till sufficient money is obtained to drink with and then discharging. "Many painters," said a trades unionist, "are drunkards, earning good pay but always squandering it. Outside painting can very easily be learnt, and even the greatest rotters soon pick it up;" and "some men," a foreman told me, "as soon as they have earned a few shillings want to go and spend half of it in beer." Even the criminal and semi-criminal classes make some use of the trade, and a witness before the Labour Commission averred that it was quite a known thing for a man to paint a house first and burgle it afterwards.¹

The result of what amounts to a huge influx of all sorts of labour into the trade is to make things very much harder for the *bonâ-fide* workmen. The amount of time worked in the total by even the most incompetent who are discharged at once, or the laziest who discharge themselves quickly, would reach a considerable amount.

¹ A case before the Stepney Distress Committee last winter is worth quoting:—"Did five months as an excavator on a building job up to February, 1906: applied in March, and said work was pretty fair, he having had three and a half days the previous week, and late in April called to say he had done none since Easter. In June he called again, having just completed six weeks' imprisonment, worked on the tram-lines for two weeks, then fell ill and went to a convalescent home for three. Then he got a month's work till his employer was not able to pay for materials, merchants ceased sending them, and men had to stop. Called again and asked for work, was out for sixteen days, and then got a job of eight weeks lasting to Christmas, when he was again out."

In default, too, of a system of bringing masters and men together, the confusion created, and the consequent difficulty of obtaining work, acts as a heavy drag on the real workers. The big firms with their well-organised staffs have less difficulty, but in other cases, and among smaller builders of whom there are so many, the selection of the right men is a great difficulty and numerous mistakes must occur. It is on these firms that so many of the lower grade workers rely; and the result has been to make an immense reserve of half-employed labour, casualised both in work and life. This means great hardship for the honest worker, little good for the failure of another trade honestly trying to retrieve himself, and altogether undeserved opportunities for the drunkard and the wastrel. Casual work means casual life, with a hand-to-mouth existence, and without thrift or foresight; and the men of this class are the despair both of trades unions, of friendly societies, and of social workers. On no flank of the many-sided problem of unemployment is there more room for useful work than in evolving a system to substitute a means for finding a regular supply of regular employment for regular hands in place of the present system with its men half-employed "casual" workers.

VIII

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND UNEMPLOYMENT

WITHOUT having quite the same direct influence on the volume of unemployment that is produced by some of the causes already considered, yet the system by which learners and others enter a trade is often indirectly of very great importance; and in this respect the artisan in the London building trade is, as we shall see, faced by the fact that the old apprenticeship system is disappearing and no other has yet risen to replace it. The sons of London workmen, indeed, do not enter at any rate the more skilled branches in very large number, though it would appear that the ranks of the labourers and of the less skilled painters receive far larger accessions from within the district. The one skilled trade that proves the exception to the general decline of apprentices is that of the plumbers, whose union makes great efforts to uphold and restore the apprenticeship system. During the last census decade a great increase in the numbers employed in the trade, and not least among the younger men, was yet compatible with a further steady decline in the number of apprentices and learners employed by representative London firms. The number employed between the age of 15 and 20 showed in 1901 an increase of 767 over 1891, and that between 20 and 25 an increase of 1018, this increase being spread fairly

evenly over all branches except for a slight decline among the plumbers and a more pronounced one among the painters; yet in 1898 the Report of the Sub-Committee of the Technical Education Board (L.C.C.) on this very question¹ reported that "the inquiry made by the Board in 1895 showed that 41 typical firms in various branches of the building trades having 12,000 employees had only 80 apprentices and 143 learners, instead of 1600, which would have been about the normal proportion. The London building trades are, in fact, mainly recruited from the country." Nothing has since occurred to invalidate the truth of this statement, but, on the contrary, the difficulty grows more pronounced as the years pass; and even within the last year, the returns of a number of firms to the Board of Trade show, if anything, a tendency to a still further decrease in the number of boys employed, though the returns have been made for too short a period to allow of any general inferences. During the time they have been given (October, 1906, to September, 1907) the number has varied from one boy to every fourteen to one to every nineteen skilled men, and between one to twenty-three and to thirty-two men of all sorts. In other districts the proportion is seldom more than one boy to fourteen men of all grades, and of skilled men the proportions range usually from one to four or five to one to seven or eight. If, however, the London lads do not very largely enter the skilled branches of these trades,

¹ The Committee apparently reported in 1898, the Report being adopted by the Board in February, 1899. [No. 837.] All future references to the Report of 1898 will be to this. References to the Report of 1906 will be to The Apprenticeship Question: Report of the section of the Education Committee appointed to consider the Question of Apprenticeships. [No. 925.]

there is reason to believe that some at least of the sons of building artisans after exhausting the various boy trades sink into the ranks of the unskilled.

Yet even now the former are not entirely closed to the Londoner, and to a certain proportion of the lads apprenticeship in some form or other is still open. For some of the big firms still take a few apprentices, though often there is some special reason for this as when foremen put their sons into their own firms with a view to training them to follow in their own footsteps; but other firms refuse to take them or at best will not take more than one or two. The general feeling among the masters appears to be that the time for apprenticeship is past, since in so many cases general conditions and especially the use of machinery has largely reduced the amount of boys' work available, and with the increasing specialisation and subdivision of crafts, such boys' work as there is has come to be a special part of the trade as peculiar to them as men's work is to men. The fact of the matter is, therefore, that, apart from all other questions, the bigger firms do not have much opportunity for training the lads except at the cost of special trouble and expense. Giving evidence before the Committee of 1898, Mr. Henry Holloway said that "the reason why apprentices were taken by the firm, although they did not pay, was because of the desire of the firm to get good mechanics. The men usually remained in the firm's employment, and afterwards compensated for the trouble bestowed on them during apprenticeship." This latter motive, however, would not always operate, and with mechanics often moving continually from firm to firm an employer cannot always hope to reap the

benefit of his foresight, and with the continual stream of good men coming in from the provinces there is no great inducement to incur the additional trouble and expense. So much for the large employers; but with the smaller local and suburban master builders more frequent openings occur for apprentices. Many of these employers with few men, and often using little machinery, are able to find work for a boy or two, and make a profit out of teaching them the trade; but there is always the danger that the lad will be allowed to run wild, or will get an insufficient training, and so turn out an inferior workman. For the comparative smallness of the contracts undertaken makes the work often unrepresentative, and lacking in that scope and variety so essential to a thorough knowledge of the trade, with the result of injuring the lad's chances of securing work with the best firms at the longest and most regular jobs. In these smaller shops many of the lads learn the trade without any formal binding as apprentices, and in suburban districts not a few are set to learn the trade with some relative in a small way of business.

In addition to apprenticeship there are various ways in which the trade can be acquired by learners and improvers. Sometimes a fee will be paid to a foreman to induce him to take a boy on and look after him; sometimes a lad will go and work with his father at a low rate of wage and get a smattering of knowledge, and will move from shop to shop gradually picking up the trade, working as an improver, till he can command full wages; and other lads will manage to get a knowledge of the trade in similar ways but without such paternal assistance. "Picking up," indeed, is probably

the most usual method through which the trade is now entered by London lads, but it tends to produce inferior workmen. "The sons of London mechanics," said a witness before the Committee of 1898, "if they become mechanics, are indifferent workmen because they have to pick up the trade as best they can," and another witness held that "the unemployed mechanics of the present time are, generally speaking, inferior workmen." Some of the lads, indeed—the smarter and more intelligent ones—are able to become thoroughly competent workmen by thus "picking up" the trade, with the further advantage, as one of them told me, of drawing far higher rates of pay than an apprentice would; but this would only occur in a minority of cases.

The result is that those London lads who do enter the skilled branches of the trade are brought up to them under the most unfavourable conditions, since few are apprenticed to the largest firms doing the best and most representative work, and when they are, the opportunities for teaching them the trade are much restricted. So the majority of apprentices are found in those shops—the smaller suburban ones—where, as we have seen, it is least desirable they should be, and the danger is that when grown up they will remain tied to those shops, doing the small and irregular jobbing work of the neighbourhood. Equally the various types of learners and improvers have limited chances of picking up the trade. Further than this, the sons of London mechanics do not very largely enter the trade; but many of the better class put their boys into clerkships and similar posts, though others fail to teach their lads a trade, with the result that they fall in the world.

For what has been said of the skilled trades does not by any means hold good of those where no special training is required. In such employments, therefore, as those of labourers, navvies, and outside house-painters, not only do sons follow their fathers, but the supply is recruited to some extent by sons of skilled artisans who sink into these positions.¹ It is quite common, indeed, for sons of painters and builders' labourers to help their fathers and learn from them what there is to be learnt; but besides this, such crafts are often a refuge for those who have grown up tradeless, after taking one casual job after another in the various boy trades—such as shop boy, van boy, rivet boy, or in ropeworks. Some of these lads come into the building trade at as early an age as 17 or 18, whilst others drop into it between 20 and 25 or even later, so that, apart from the way these sections are recruited from the failures of other trades, the supply of painters and builders' labourers is largely recruited from among London boys.

Many causes have co-operated to produce the existing state of affairs, and however loud may be the theoretical approval of apprenticeship, obstacles are in practice always being put in its way and from the most unexpected quarters. The masters find many reasons against it, not the least of them being the altered conditions brought about by recent changes in the trade, but in the main the question is a purely economic one, namely, that the taking of apprentices involves an actual loss.

¹ An inquiry made by the Stepney Distress Committee into the early careers of some of its applicants throws some light on this; and though the sons of mechanics in the building trade were too few to admit of generalisation, yet such as these were provided several instances of the tendency of sons of mechanics to become casual or at least unskilled labourers.

Much boys' work is now done by machinery, and with crafts so subdivided the teaching of the whole trade is a matter of great difficulty, and, so far as boys are wanted at all, it is not apprentices but lads to devote and confine themselves to certain classes of work. Moreover, with expenses in London so heavy, and with many masters now working nearly at cost of production, they require every bench to be filled by skilled men producing a maximum of work, so that no room is left for boys. Some masters, too, refuse to take any because they feel they cannot give them a proper training, whilst the difficulty of getting rid of unruly indentured apprentices, as many of them are, is predisposing masters in favour of non-indentured ones and improvers who can be sacked as occasion requires. But after all, the main difficulty is a financial one, and it appears practically impossible to fix a premium which, whilst remunerating the employer, will not be out of reach of the parents of the boys. As things are, "whilst London employers can import from the provinces artisans who have been trained where space is plentiful, rents cheap, and time in carrying out the work of comparatively small importance, they find the importation of provincial workmen, ready made, cheaper than the production of workmen in London itself." (Report of 1898.)

Nor are the parents in many ways any more eager, in actual practice, to apprentice their sons and this for a variety of reasons. Many of them still desire, as when *Life and Labour* was written, to raise their sons in the world by putting them into clerkships and similar jobs, and these are often the most thrifty and far-sighted, the men who would be best able and most willing, if they

wished to apprentice their boys, to pay any reasonable sum for the purpose. Moreover, it is inevitable that many parents who would be willing to do this refuse because they feel there is often no guarantee that the lad will receive an adequate training. The general feeling is that "the employers will not take the trouble about apprenticeship. . . . In ordinary apprenticeship the lad is allowed to run wild, and so is brought up into a very second-rate workman;" and, moreover, with the best will in the world, it is often impossible for employers under present conditions to give the thorough teaching that apprenticeship ought to imply, and it is not to be wondered at that many of the workmen fight shy of it. Again, to many others the comparatively large earnings that a boy of 14 to 16 can make in many of the boys' trades is of great importance, and in many cases the desire for a large immediate return is allowed to outweigh more solid future advantages. Some of the worse paid and less regularly employed mechanics have little choice in the matter, but others, it is to be feared, will not make the sacrifice necessary for the future welfare of their children.

Nor are the boys themselves entirely satisfactory, many preferring a large immediate return to making provision for a more distant future, so that many of them at the age of 20 or 25 are left without any occupation except unskilled labour. In the words of the report of 1906: "The high wages that a lad can earn as an errand boy or van boy or district messenger, or in other occupations confined to youths, are more attractive than the low wages associated with an industrial training. Earning looms larger in his imagination than

the more laborious and less remunerative learning." The words apply to other trades besides that of building, but it is in building, as labourers or painters, that many openings are found for those who have so grown up. In building, too, there is always the chance of hanging about and picking up odd jobs as a labourer or painter, earning 7d. an hour in one case and even more perhaps in the other. Moreover, in some cases men have their own slackness or carelessness to thank that they have not gained a skilled trade. A case in point was that of a man who told me that if he had had his wits about him he would have learnt a trade, but as it was he allowed himself to be used as odd boy, and so grew up unskilled. Even those who are apprenticed do not always give satisfaction. Often unruly and often lazy, the unsatisfactory character of many is one of the causes of the frequent refusal to take lads to learn the trade. Existing conditions often render it easy for a lad to run wild, and some prefer to have a good time to applying themselves to their work, to the despair of the masters and the exasperation of the men responsible for them.

The workmen generally are in many cases none too favourably disposed towards the lads, for, with the ever-present fear of losing their employment, they are apt to look with jealousy on all possible rivals and competitors; and as such they often regard the lads, failing to see that it is the constant stream of men from the provinces that is far more dangerous. Whilst, therefore, it would appear to be in their own best interests to enable the London boys to get a thorough training and so check the provincial supply, they are inclined to neglect the latter and to put hindrances in the way of the former

and do little to help them. "Consequently," I was told, "the result is that if the lad is civil and obliging he may get a little help, but if not, he is more likely to have half a brick thrown at him, to be left to look after himself, and to be laughed at when he makes mistakes." Often, too, the lad is not put under any particular man, meaning that in practice he is left to run wild; so that perhaps his best chance is, as some do though fewer than formerly, to learn the trade with his father. Nor do the trades unions appear to take any very active steps to ensure a thorough training being given to their boys, though there is perhaps not so very much they can do. The plumbers, indeed, still strive energetically and not altogether unsuccessfully to uphold and enforce apprenticeship in their branch; and the plasterers encouraged attendance at technical schools by prizes for proficiency in the subjects taught there; but outside these unions not very much appears to be done. Perhaps there is not much that can be.¹

The result of all these influences has been the decline of the system of apprenticeship. For almost every one is against it, the masters chiefly on financial grounds, the parents either seeking other openings or preferring large immediate earnings, the lads doing likewise, whilst the apprentices themselves are too often unsatisfactory and the workmen not seldom jealous of them. The

¹ An answer given to the Labour Commission by one firm (London and Rugby) to whom the table of questions was sent stated that, "To completely gain as they might do the confidence of the employers and the public, they [the trade unions] ought to insist on each member making himself as efficient and producing as much as possible. In addition, they should take greater interest in technical education of their younger workmen, and the best thing they can do is to insist that each master, both in London and the provinces, should employ a number of apprentices in fixed proportion to his workmen."

result is that prominent members of the trade, and not a few trade unionists, are directing their attention to the possibilities of technical education and to a new policy based on the co-ordination of training in schools of building or other institutions with workshop instruction in the various firms.

Many of their proposals deserve serious thought and the possibility considered by the London County Council Apprenticeship Committee of 1906 of substituting a general system of technical training for that of apprenticeship cannot be lightly set aside. There is, however, still a section of the trade headed by the Plumbers' Union who uphold the old policy and make strenuous efforts to retain it. They regard technical trade schools when properly conducted as useful adjuncts to practical work in the shop, but hold that anything more than this would check the attempt to revive apprenticeship on practical lines. Some of their objections will have to be met. Among other things, they fear the overstocking of the trade with half-trained men, and the principal of one of the County Council schools told me that a great and legitimate cause of complaint was the "handymen" who acquire a smattering of knowledge and then try to cut out the skilled men by working at reduced rates. Against this, therefore, and against the flooding of the labour market, precautions will have to be taken in any system that may be evolved. In many ways, however, the line of cleavage between the two schools of thought is deeper than this, since the advocates of apprenticeship regard it as capable of having a far wider scope than it has at present, and regard the other policy as endangering the existence of a useful

and desirable institution. They on their part, in advocating a complete system of technical schools, aim less at doing away with apprenticeship than at filling the gaps the decay of it has left vacant and supplementing the training at present given to apprentices where that proves insufficient. The result of this contest is likely to be the deciding factor in the future industrial training in the building trades of London; but at present we are in the position that apprenticeship in London is more and more going out of fashion, whilst there is as yet no system ready to take its place, and the London trade is as a result chiefly recruited from the provinces.

In their own sphere, however, the technical schools have already done extremely useful work, though their influence at present extends only to some of the men. In a sense, they may be said to affect the men as individuals, but many such individuals have profited very greatly by them, and the numbers entering the schools show a satisfactory increase.¹ The Report of 1897 stated of the preliminary manual training in the use of tools given in some of the elementary schools that "evidence has been received from more than one witness that it is producing a good effect on the few boys who do succeed in entering the building trades in London"; and this could and can still be said of the technical schools. Use is probably made of them by young provincials finishing their training in London and by older men for various purposes, but to those Londoners who are learning the trade they are of even

¹ *E.g.* in the Brixton School, the only one entirely devoted to building, the number of students rose from 569 in 1905 to 634 in 1906, and those in regular attendance from 521 to 603 or from 91.6 to 95.1 per cent.

greater help. This is especially the case with those who are learning the trade by other methods than regular apprenticeship; and admitting the need of practical workshop training, there are many ways in which those who are "picking up" the trade in the shops can through the schools get a thorough knowledge of it. The help given to boys learning the trade with their fathers is perhaps particularly useful, whilst even the indentured apprentices can learn much, thus being provided with that which the exigencies of modern business prevent them learning in the shop. Probably the best of all classes of learners make use of the schools, gaining among other things a general knowledge of the principles of the trade and so being able to follow more quickly and more easily the methods of the shop, whilst the shop itself gives that actual practical knowledge that no technical school, however good, can provide. Further, the schools do much to teach new and special processes, a policy beneficial not only to the learner but to the fully-trained man who will no doubt resort to them largely for such purposes. Care will, however, have to be taken to prevent them being devoted too exclusively to such work to the exclusion of more commonplace but more generally useful processes.

In spite of the work of the schools, however, the trade is still left to be recruited chiefly from the provincial workmen who come to London. This, however, is no new thing. Witnesses before the Trades' Union Commission of 1867-1869 mentioned the arrival of young men from the provinces, and more than one witness before the Committee of 1898 mentioned the large preponderance of provincial men. As for the present day the

foreman in charge told me that "nearly all the men on the University College buildings had been born or had learnt the trade in the provinces." The supply, indeed, is not confined entirely to the young men who come up to London on completing their apprenticeship, but provincial builders who obtain a London contract often bring, or are followed by, a number of men; whilst among the number of men who are always on tramp from places where wages are low to those where they are high, London is one of the most attractive. The reverse process is far less common. Contractors do not take to the provinces London men to whom they will have to pay London rates, but prefer provincial labour at provincial rates, whilst the London men will seldom go of their own accord to places where wages are less. Even in the busiest times, therefore, with labour always coming in from the provinces, the big firms at any rate have been able to get sufficient men. Moreover, the smart young provincial can generally be sure of a good job, employers and foremen being always on the look-out for likely recruits; whilst most of the men do not come up on the chance of work but get a post through friends or relatives. Moreover, London, if deficient in the means of obtaining a general training, is, owing to the growth of specialisation, an excellent finishing school in the various processes. This favours the provincial both ways. To the Londoner, special knowledge of a single branch of his craft is but poor compensation for deficient general training, whilst his rival gets first an excellent general groundwork before putting the finishing touches in London.

The actual supply of labour probably comes rather

from the smaller country places than from the larger towns. From big places such as Manchester, Leeds, or Birmingham, with their high rates and often lesser cost of living than in London, the migration cannot except under special inducement be very large, and the probability is that, though to a much lesser extent, they are themselves recruited from their immediate vicinity. It is the smaller towns and the country districts that chiefly supply London, and many men no doubt come to it from places just outside the twelve-mile radius. "London trade," a witness told the Labour Commission, "extends into the agricultural districts where men meeting a carpenter or a mason readily set their sons to learn a trade. It is perhaps especially from the Midlands, and above all the south and south-west of England where wages are lowest, that men who aspire to a better position than any they can attain to in their country towns and villages make their way to London and readily find places. Apart from the displacement of the Londoner, this influx tends to complicate the problems of unemployment because it renders more difficult the regulation of the number of those who enter the trade. Even if it were recruited locally, the number of those entering the trade could not be adapted exactly to the demand, but in bad times there would be an almost automatic check since fathers would hesitate to put their sons into it. But the stream from the provinces is less regulable, for the hope of obtaining larger wages tends to cause the condition of employment to be neglected and many come to fill a post that is waiting for them. The result is that the influx continues in full

force long after trade has declined and the supply is insufficiently affected by periods of depression.

The question, therefore, resolves itself into this—whether it is possible by any system of training to put a check upon the influx of provincial workmen into London? Here, however, a distinction must be made, the object being not to prevent the able and competent provincial from raising himself in the world, but to enable the London workman to compete on fair terms with the provincial. As things are, the latter too often has open to him a process of training which the Londoner has not unless indeed he goes down to serve an apprenticeship in the provinces. So that not only does the London lad seldom enter the trade, but when he does he often fails to get a proper training; and in addition to other consequences, the more responsible posts, such as those of foreman and clerk of the works with all that their possession implies, fall mainly to provincials, and most of the chances that do fall to London bred men are bound up in the schools and other means of training, so that many who have risen owe it in some way or other to this. It is to fill the gap thus made that the supporters of a system of technical schools advocate their policy; and failing a practical scheme for the revival of apprenticeships, it is this or nothing. The policy put forward combines a training in the use of various tools, wood, and metal without reference to any particular trades at the elementary schools—the policy generally including the extension of the school age to 15. The Committee of 1898 reported favourably on this policy so far as it existed then. “Evidence has been received from more than one

witness that this manual training is producing a good effect on the few boys who succeed in entering the building trades in London." They went on to suggest a further two years' training after leaving school in day classes where the above manual training would be carried further, and the boys would also be "taught the geometry of their trades," and be given some knowledge of materials. Without attempting to turn out a finished workman, the Committee hoped that "a boy who had spent two years in such a school would afterwards learn the trade methods of the workshop so rapidly that he would involve no loss to an employer who would take him on at 10s. a week without demanding any premium."

The important period of the lad's training is that between the ages of 16 and 21, the years that would be covered by apprenticeship; and whilst such preliminary training would fit a boy to use tools and so to learn the trade quickly, the great point is to discover a means of giving that teaching to the trade which apprenticeship formerly provided. The policy of the supporters of technical schools was to have a complete system all over London sufficient to make provision for all who are entering the trade, this to be accompanied by a reorganisation of the apprenticeship charities and a system of scholarships. Given this, two or three policies might be possible. It might be possible—though strict regulation would be needed to avoid abuses and overcrowding of the trade—to combine a technical course with work in the shop as a learner or improver, or, with the preliminary training outlined above, the apprenticeship difficulty might be more easy to overcome, which perhaps the Report intended to suggest. Yet another

suggestion was that of apprenticing the lads for two or three years to the Council for a thorough training in one of the schools from about 14 to 17, to be followed by two more years in evening classes whilst working in the shop. Possibly the great thing is to evolve some plan to replace the present chaotic condition of the apprenticeship system, and probably the successful solution will combine two or more of several separate schemes, whilst any undesirable developments can be carefully checked.

IX

THE INTERACTION OF DIFFERENT CAUSES

It will now be necessary to consider briefly the combined action of the various causes, which hitherto have so far as possible been discussed in isolation, in order to understand the exact condition of things at the present time. That condition, with its great prevalence of unemployment, results not only from the operation of many influences at the moment, but from that of the same and of others in the past, and from their interaction one upon another at the present. The key to the present, therefore, lies in its growth out of the past and in the varied component parts of which it is made up.

First, the great prosperity of a few years since tended in the past to postpone and to veil the action of those changes in the trade which appear at first sight to have developed so rapidly in the last few years. For those changes of method and process that are transforming the trade had already made a beginning even before the great boom in the 'nineties commenced. The use of iron, sanitary development, and the specialisation of processes had already made great progress, the latter especially, and importation of, *e.g.*, joinery work both from abroad and from the provinces was showing signs of the great increase that has since taken place. At the same time such changes attracted comparatively

little notice; for rapid though their progress often was, the growth in the demand for labour was even more rapid, and their effect was less felt at any rate in the later 'nineties than it would have been under more normal conditions. Even as it was, it was sufficient to cause the numbers employed in some branches of the trade to increase comparatively slowly, but nevertheless the check given to entrants into the trade was not equal to that which such changes would normally have required and produced. Seasonal causes, too, were reduced to a minimum, for there was so much work to be done that even of those kinds of work which usually fall off at certain periods of the year a great deal was pushed on at all seasons and at the highest possible speed. Similarly the evils of the lack of system in, and of opportunities for, learning the trade were seen and feared by some far-sighted men just as those other changes were, but were not very severely felt so long as work remained so plentiful even for imperfectly-trained men. Further, not only did these changes in method and process pass comparatively unnoticed, but their development was encouraged by the boom with the resulting increase in speculation and enterprise; and additional new processes, pioneered in many cases by firms of their own, were largely introduced.

Moreover, the great rush into the trade had its effect on the smaller firms and on the employment of casual labour. The former, instead of, as in normal or slack periods, often only working "off and on," were engaged far more regularly and sometimes almost continually, with the result that the men on their staffs, whether usually half-employed casuals or not, could far more

frequently get regular or nearly regular work. Reserve labour of the "off-and-on" type was working continually, and consequently, instead of their usual floating surplus, a great many small firms and little master-workmen now had few or no more men than they could use. So, therefore, in the depression that followed, the trade was left with a very large reserve, whilst it is probable that not a few men who had become accustomed to regular employment were thereby unfitted for the task of continually looking for and finding a variety of different jobs.

When demand fell off, therefore, the men were often found unprepared for the change, with few preparations made to meet it, whilst adaptation was rendered less easy. For nearly all the branches had very largely increased in numbers, in many cases after a decrease in previous years, so that changes affecting the demand for labour not only had not been met by a decrease in the number of entrants but by an often vast increase in sympathy with the general prosperity, and for the supply of the immediate needs of the time. Men, therefore, in augmented numbers, had to face a twofold decrease due to a general and very severe trade depression, and also to the previous spread and the, at present, still more rapid development of changes in the trade. Lack of sufficient training, too, has further handicapped many who have entered the trade, since with trade so bad and often carried out only a little above the level of cost of production, employers have an additional inducement to utilise the provincial supply to get labour that is superior to much that is found in London itself. Seasonal, especially quasi-seasonal, influences have

begun to operate again with greater consistency, and with the falling off of the trade of the small masters the work of the casual labourer has become as irregular as it was before the period of prosperity began, if not more so; and with overmuch labour everywhere the failure of immediate sources of employment leaves less subsidiary resources elsewhere than had been the case previously. Moreover, whilst, bad as their direct effect has been, recent changes have caused trade development to attack men under the most unfavourable circumstances, the influence of general London conditions has been such as to accentuate much that is worst at the present time.

For the very hugeness of London not only gives to the building trades their size and importance, but renders them more liable to many of the evils from which they suffer. The great specialisation and subdivision of its industries is one of the chief hindrances to the giving of that complete training that is so necessary, whilst its size and the multitudes of its workers often prevent that close intercourse between master and apprentice that is often so marked a feature of provincial life, and the attractions of London life distract many apprentices from proper attention to their industrial training—the effect on attendance at evening schools being specially great—to an extent that is not found elsewhere. Above all, London conditions multiply openings for that employment of boy labour at temporarily high wages that does so much to create materials for casual manhood labour. Variations, too, are apt to be more violent because of the immense area over which they extend; and the lack of organisation within the

trade that is partially responsible for this is itself partly due to the large area over which organisation has to be extended, and it is thus less easy to balance the better trade of one district against the worse trade of another. Fluctuations in a small country town or even in a large provincial city are more easily dealt with by reason of the lesser area affected. Interchange of surplus labour takes place more readily than in London, both between firm and firm and even between district and district, and regulation takes place not only more easily, because there is less to regulate, but more naturally for the same reason. One result of London conditions, indeed, appears to be a greater tendency than elsewhere to the casualisation of labour, the continual occurrence and recurrence of different changes, tending as we shall see to casualise the labour affected, and because of its size the friction produced in London by these causes is all the greater. Similarly the leakage produced by the contract system in London is all the greater because in a small area the workman can get to know far more accurately exactly what contracts are going on and where, and because there are not among provincial firms the constant variations in the composition of the actual numbers employed or in the kind of work done that are experienced in London. In London not only is leakage rendered more probable, but the mass of small firms doing irregular work give far more opening for casual labour of every kind, whilst high London wages provide for the "slacker" and the quasi-loafer opportunities of obtaining high returns by little, and often inefficient, work, and the very worst characters can far more easily continue to get and to lose job after job with firm after

firm in London than in provincial towns where they soon become marked men.

Again, the regulation of the labour supply and the prevention of the effects of fluctuations is often impeded by the vastness of the metropolis. Not only is the elasticity of the workman cribbed and confined, making it more difficult for him to move from district to district, but the adaptation of the supply to the demand is more difficult to carry out. A distinct check¹ is imposed on trade union development which renders organisation more difficult, whilst proselitising is checked and therefore the ranks of non-unionists are often being recruited by default. The slackness of trades unionists in this respect was made a cause of complaint by witnesses before the Labour Commission, but probably natural obstacles were at least as much to blame as any shortcomings of this kind. Moreover, looking beyond the purely trade union point of view, all regulation is made more difficult in London, and any other form of it, such as that proposed by means of labour exchanges, will also have a heavier task because of the size of London and apart altogether from the hitherto unchecked growth of the evil. Finally, there can be little doubt that the supply of so large a proportion of the labour required from outside the metropolis helps to increase the surplus numbers in the trade, for a check to demand will, where sources of supply are chiefly local, bring about a more or less automatic decrease in new entrants, who will keep out of a trade that is doing badly. But to the provincial not only are actual London conditions less clearly known, especially in smaller towns and rural

¹ *Vide* Chapter XI.

districts, but very often they come to take up a particular job and not to take their chance, and, coming into the better class of labour, they are more affected by the rate of pay than the amount of unemployment, and still continue to enter the London trade even with things as bad as they are now.

Finally, before quitting the subject before us, the effect upon one another of variations in demand, of casual employment, and of the character of the men employed must be considered. For the great tendency to casualisation in the building trade, and especially in that of London, is apt to conceal the fact that there is such a tendency in all trade where periodical fluctuations are common, a tendency that may be checked or even occasionally obliterated by strict organisation, but which as a rule leaves some trail of casual labour behind it. Periods of unemployment injure the efficiency of the men, tramping for work is apt to degrade them, so that often it is but a step from periodic unemployment to casual employment. Decreased efficiency and weakened energy will sooner or later fit a man only for casual and intermittent employment. After each depression, therefore, whilst some men will recover their old position as regular workers, others will be casualised beyond recall, to be replaced in their old posts by fresh labour; and each fluctuation will add its quota of men to those who are permanently extruded from regular employment.

Among others this tendency is at work in the London building trades, but it is here of less importance than that general irregularity that characterises the contract system. This is made all the greater by a naturally

wide variation in the character of the jobs undertaken, and with a very large number of firms engaged in the work labour is taken on and discharged in the manner already described, and its supply is almost unregulated. For each man "calls round" and takes his chance in the search for work. A surplus of labour is therefore largely inevitable, since over such a number of shops means do not at present exist for dovetailing the busy days of some on to the slack days of others, and a half-employed reserve is in existence, of which only a part will be at work on any one given day, and these day to day irregularities must be added to the more permanent variations.

Such casualisation of labour, moreover, means not only casual work but casual life with all that this implies, and further, the men whose aim is to work and to live casually are encouraged by the high hourly rates of pay to enter the trade for what it can give them, so increasing the surplus and the casualisation of labour by intensifying the competition for places. The sufferers are not the first-class men—men who can nearly always get work—nor yet the men of no class who from their own point of view get what they want—comparatively high pay, intermittent work, long holidays. It is the average man who suffers, just as the severity of a cyclical depression is to be measured, not by the sufferings of the chronically unemployed, but by the numbers of men on the average who, and the extent to which they, suffer. Such men are often crowded out of their market by non-*bonâ-fide* workmen, and their chance of regular or even of a decent proportion of casual labour is taken from them, and they are in danger as

their work becomes more casual of sinking to the state of those who are not merely casual workers, but casual in every way.

And the influence of the quality of labour has in its turn an effect on the regularity of employment that is sometimes ignored altogether, though at others it is over-estimated. For it is sometimes said that laziness, inefficiency, and drunkenness, and other defects of the individual, do not affect anything but the incidence of unemployment, that they determine not so much whether a man shall be employed or unemployed, but which man or men among a number shall be out of a job. This is true enough in the limited sense that is intended, that the incidence of a given amount of unemployment is determined by the comparative efficiency of the different individuals liable to be affected, but the argument proves fallacious if used in the widest sense, namely, that the general level of efficiency or inefficiency has no effect on the volume of unemployment. On the contrary, it has an important bearing on it through its influence on the regularity of employment. In fact, just as casual labour is often inefficient labour, so inefficiency in its turn often produces casualisation. One great object of regularising his work, as Mr. (now Sir John) Burt told the Labour Commission, is that thus a builder is able to get good men because he can keep them constantly employed. But this obviously corresponds closely to the efficiency of the labour supply available, and where, as is often the case in London, this supply though ample in quantity is defective in quality it will generally prove more advantageous, if circumstances permit it to be done, to take on a large

quantity of labour, carry the work through quickly, and discharge some hands as soon as the job is finished. Labour being inefficient, the most desirable course is often to carry the work through quickly, thus taking advantage of more favourable seasons and other such conditions and ensuring as quick a turnover of capital as possible. One result of this is that those firms who cannot rely on getting sufficient competent workmen get most of their work done in the spring or summer months, thus giving these periods more than a fair proportion of the work at the expense of winter months and times of bad weather. The general causes that produce, or that tend to check, such variations have already been considered; but that one which consists in the quality of the labour engaged, whether tending to seasonal irregularity or to that between job and job, needs always to be kept in sight.

For the very composite character of the men engaged in the trade, varying as it does from the very best type of artisan down to the unemployable, and passing on the way through an infinite succession of only slightly differing grades, is one of the most perplexing problems of the trade; whilst the existence of so many inferior types is apt to blind one to the main body of honest and sober workmen. Great care is needed in selecting men, and much time is often spent by employers and foremen in weeding out the inefficients; but the best firms at any rate generally have an ample supply of good men available, provided the foreman is up to his work. One foreman of a big firm said, for instance, "There are many men I would take at once if they called, and hundreds whom

I would not look at," and described his own staff as "real working men who want to get six days' work in the week and get a week's wages to take home to their families to keep them up." But between these men and the lowest class of workman there are many types varying alike in industry and ability, and in personal character and prudence. There are those who are not good workers, but also those who are only good workers. These latter, for instance, include men who will work well and steadily when work is before them and who are always willing to work, but who show a greater or less incapacity to find work when they are out of a job. Next below these come the men who will work and work well often for months on end, but who deliberately prefer to take spells of idleness in between different jobs on the money they have earned at them. Mingled, too, with many honest though casual hands who do their best both in working and in seeking work, are many who deliberately enter the trade for the opportunities its high rates of pay afford for a free-and-easy existence of alternative work and play, who can never be relied on to turn up at their employment for very long together. Many of them like to stand with their hands in their pockets till a nice easy job turns up, and refuse a chance of work if it means stirring a mile or two from their accustomed haunts.¹ Moreover, it is not only their steadiness as workmen, but their general habits that are important. Many men as soon as they have earned

¹ A man of this type who came under my notice lived in Limehouse and being offered the chance of a job in Paddington, off the Edgware Road, refused indignantly: "Did we expect him to wear his boots out walking? He had always got work in the parish and was not going to stir out of it!"

a few shillings want to go and drink half of it away; and some even come and, working for a few hours, discharge themselves as soon as they have earned enough to go and drink with; and the sort of job they like is one where they can stand with their hands in their pockets.

The existence of such a fringe, the growth of which is often encouraged by the conditions existing in the trade, is the cause of much hardship to the classes just above it. The best type of all is not very much affected; but a good many average men and, as already mentioned, the honest casual labour suffer a great deal, since, in the words of Mr. Charles Booth, "each class tends to drag down the one just above it." Not only are their chances of regular work injured by the presence of so many such men in an already over-stocked labour market, but they are in danger of being themselves dragged down into the lower class. If it is true that the incompetent and idle are usually out of a job, and the honest and industrious mechanic in one, yet the very presence of such a number of incompetent ne'er-do-weels does great injury to many steady average workmen, and their elimination in some way or other is most urgently needed, but measures to protect both masters and men against them have yet to be taken.

X

INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROVIDING AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

THE extent to which distress will be met or avoided and the means by which this can be done will depend on various conditions, only one of which, the character of the labour engaged, has as yet been considered. For reasons already explained, therefore, the effectiveness of the others will vary from case to case according to the character of the individual, and these variations will be many because of diversities of character. Among the things to be considered are the rates of wages earned, the means of making provision for unemployment, alternative employments, and thrift in its various manifestations, whilst there are a variety of expedients adopted by the men who suffer from periods of unemployment.

The rates of wages earned have naturally an important bearing on such questions, since all provision by the individual must depend on the earning of a wage sufficient to leave a surplus over and above the needs of daily life. Indeed, a trade that has a natural tendency towards irregularity of employment is generally found with higher rates of wages given to compensate for this irregularity and thus enable the worker to keep his standard of living up to that of workers of corresponding

position and ability in trades not so affected; and for this reason among others comparatively high rates are paid in the building trades generally. The rates paid in London for the skilled branches work out at from 43s. to 46s. a week for a 50 hours' week, except with painters who earn from 33s. 5d. to 37s. 6d. Labourers get 29s. 2d. for the same hours, whilst scaffolders and some other special branches earn just over 31s., the hourly rates being 11d. for plumbers and plasterers, 10½d. for the other skilled branches, 8½d. to 9d. for painters, 7½d. for scaffolders, and 7d. for labourers, and the hours 50 a week for 36 weeks and 44 for the remaining 16.¹ Not only are these rates high compared with trades where employment is more regular and where continual variations within the year are avoided, but are better than those paid in less organised trades, such as dock labour and parts of the furniture trade, where employment is equally irregular. Overtime is paid for at a rate beginning at time and a quarter for the first two hours and rising to double time, and the increase it brings is large in proportion to the large hourly payments, so that in some cases it helps to balance what is lost through seasonal and other variations, especially with painters where the pronounced seasonal character of the trade causes a great deal of work to be crowded into a few months and little to be done in the others. The ordinary rates earned, about 42s. a week on an average all the year, or 43s. 9d. for 50 hours, compare favourably with the 40s. for 54 hours of the iron-founders and the 39s.

¹ Thus the average rate for the whole year comes to about 44s. for plasterers, and 42s. a week for the plumbers, who get 11d. working 47 and 44 hours instead of 50 and 44 respectively; painters 36s. to 34s. and labourers about 28s.

for 54 with turners, fitters, and smiths, and 52½ with the compositors, and the 30s. and 25s. with boot lasters and finishers respectively for 54 hours. Labourers' wages, too, are in advance of most of those of other unskilled trades, generally being from 1d. to 1½d., or about 4s. to 7s. a week, better, and their hours, as with the skilled trades, are appreciably less.

Wages, therefore, are obviously fixed to allow a certain amount of provision for periods of lack of employment, which are indeed the chief reason for the existence of such high rates. Overtime is not now common, but the nature of the trade sometimes renders it necessary, and this is recognised by the men themselves, especially in the more seasonal kinds of work—painting, repairs, renewals, extensions, and shopfitting. It is, moreover, common in much of the smaller building that is crowded into the late days of the summer, though here the overtime rules are no doubt often evaded. Except, therefore, so far as the best men may gravitate to these jobs in the summer and back to the longer and more regular ones in the winter, those who suffer from seasonal slackness are apt to benefit from seasonal pressure. Allowances, however, must be made on the other side. More stoppages from rain in bad weather, including short ones of a few hours, have to be made than in other trades, whilst time lost between job and job, even if only a day or two, may amount to no inconsiderable period during the course of a year. Further, the higher rates earned are at least partly counter-balanced by heavy house rent and higher expenses of living than in some other big towns, but as was pointed out in *Life and Labour*, London, if in some respects the dearest, is in

others the cheapest place "to live in," owing to many facilities for buying in large quantities and therefore cheaply. This facility, however, is not possessed by all, nor is it always utilised where it might be.

Nevertheless the fact remains that the building trade rates are calculated on a basis sufficient to make some provision for the chances of unemployment, and to the man in regular or practically regular employment the steady 42s. or so a week is a means to a distinctly good standard of living, whilst some of the men, doing specially difficult parts of their trade and earning a regular minimum of 11½d. or 1s. an hour, are well provided for at all times. Many of these men, gauge-workers, for instance, or brickcutters, are often scarce enough to be not easily obtainable even at times like the present when labour generally is plentiful. In fact, all the best men fare as well as any, since the weekly wage is almost if not quite the best in London. The average man, however, has to do what he can on these higher wages to provide for that less regular employment that is to some extent one of the normal conditions of the building trade, which therefore creates in most cases the expectation of some loss of time. This loss, however, is not evenly divided over the whole trade, falling lightly on some and very heavily on others, whilst it varies greatly in severity from year to year. But all the same, the standard wage does give some means of making provision and of ensuring at any rate against the more normal, and therefore more calculable, changes, though it is difficult to see how any rate can be devised to protect even the moderately thrifty against depressions of extraordinary length, though in a limited number of

cases some sort of provision can be made by means of unemployed benefit. The men, however, who make the best provision even in times of great prosperity for the return of depression are many of them just the men who are least likely to need such provision even in the worst of times, whilst those who fall victims to the worst of the depression are often the least thrifty and therefore the least able to bear any such loss.

Moreover, the means for making such provision, given the necessary saving, are in the building trade somewhat limited, and the openings for insurance against unemployment are few and confined to a few branches. In this respect they are to be sharply distinguished from many other benefits—sick, accident, superannuation, and funeral benefits being paid by nearly all the large trade unions and most of them by friendly societies, whilst unemployed benefit is only paid by the carpenters' unions and one society of painters, the others having only the less satisfactory substitute of travelling pay. Apart from the limited scope of these unemployed benefits, there are practically no direct openings for insurance, if we except the small "Hard-up Clubs," societies of friends who put by for a fund through which any misfortune among them can be relieved; for unions composed of members of a trade have means, which the more diverse friendly societies do not possess, of knowing and proving the *bonâ-fides* of a man's claim. They have also better means of preventing malingering. The thrifty workers, therefore, especially of the better class, devote themselves to laying by a fund for periods of bad trade, through the savings bank or other means, and many of them fix their

standard of living and their weekly expenses to an average throughout the year. Periods of very bad trade which are long continued can often be met in this way and in this way only under existing conditions, and it will be a matter partly of luck, partly of individual character, whether this is sufficient.

Under the circumstances it is only natural that with so few opportunities available for this form of thrift far more ample provision should be made for sick and other benefit than for unemployment, the lack of means for investing savings for the latter purpose resulting in a distinct discouragement of this form of thrift. The steady outlay of 1s. a week for the total trade union's benefits is the most easy and simple method of doing so. The promise of a certain guaranteed return to cover a period exceeding the ordinary time of unemployment has a very useful effect, and it is unfortunate that it is not more often adopted or more frequently available, whilst with savings unassisted by some such means those of years are too often swallowed up by even a moderate period of unemployment, and naturally men prefer the certain return of a friendly society or sick club over the danger of losing all they have saved. Though, therefore, as we get lower and lower in the scale even such provision grows less frequent, the numbers who make some sort of insurance for sickness and old age and still more for that lesser form of thrift in insurance and burial societies is very much greater.

There are, however, various expedients adopted for meeting the difficulty, showing sometimes no little ingenuity and forethought, and an attempt is often made to apply the money saved to some profitable form

of enterprise, since otherwise mere saving is apt to be but a poor bulwark, and with the less well-paid sections the putting by of £6 or £7 is a long business, and to save enough to live upon until trade revives is neither easy nor always possible. Some men, therefore, attempt to use their savings as capital, the line of investment most favoured being usually though not invariably a small grocery or greengrocery store. Then the wife minds the shop whilst the husband works, the latter assisting in the busiest times, in the evenings and on Saturday, which building trade hours enable him to do. When he is out of work, there are the proceeds to fall back upon, and he hopes to work up his connection when things are slack in his own trade. The venture, however, has more to recommend it as a manifestation of thrift than from any large measure of practical success it has obtained. For the openings available for these small businesses are not very great, nearly every part of London and more particularly of working-class London being overrun with them; moreover, the chances of success for men engaged in another trade and working such shops at odd moments are not great. Not seldom, therefore, failure and loss result, leaving the man the less prepared than before to meet unemployment as the result of this praiseworthy but too often misguided effort at thrift. A lower form of this that is sometimes resorted to is the use of savings as capital for street-hawking; but here again the amateur is at a disadvantage in competing with the expert. Still some sort of earnings will be made which are eked out by living on the capital till that is exhausted.

Another form of thrift that, though common, is not

so obvious is the constant selling and pawning of furniture. Often the picture of the thriftless parting with his furniture in the effort to make head against the distress for which he has neglected to provide is rightly drawn. The untidy home, with the few bits of furniture and "nothing left to pawn," usually deserves all that is said about it, and the early exhaustion of such resources will be sure evidence of a hand-to-mouth existence. But besides these homes there are others furnished in an ample and often a substantial manner, with well-framed pictures, and solid sofas, tables, and chests of drawers, where the furniture is pawned and sold regularly. Here we have a peculiar form of thrift, not without advantages to recommend it, since it performs the double duty of providing alternately a good home and resources against want and starvation. Often in the case of seasonal workers the home is regularly pawned winter by winter and as regularly redeemed when summer and good times return. An exceptional depression, like the present in the building trade, will often mean the permanent exile of the family furniture; but with all its disadvantages, that of wear and tear especially, rendered worse by the continual going to and fro from the pawnshop, this device has very obvious advantages. Not confined to good furniture but including also good clothes, especially such secondary necessities as mantles and overcoats, good ornaments and pictures, it enables a solid and usually a calculable lay-by to be made, the certainty of the return often being very great. Moreover, the partial possession of these things may have a humanising influence, and generally produces greater care, cleanliness, and tidiness

as well as greater thrift; and even where most of the assets have already gone, the general air of neatness and tidiness bewrays itself. The thriftless home itself is of two varieties. In one there is fairly ample and fairly solid furniture, but with all sorts of non-negotiable articles heaped about; in others all the furniture is poor, most of the clothes are rags, and little of value is left even at the very beginning of unemployment. A sure sign of thriftlessness is a number of useless articles collected about the room; and the existence of an amount of cheap glassware of no value whatever is very suggestive, especially in the absence of more solid assets; and it will generally be true that, wages and other things being equal, the thriftiness of the family varies with the solidity of the furniture, though one has to look carefully at the latter.

Another expedient, especially of the workers in the more seasonal parts of the trade, is that of existing by running into debt in bad and squaring the books in good seasons. This is especially the case with painters, among whom many of quite good class rely on making overtime so as to pay debts, the contraction of which has carried them over the winter. This is most commonly done with the rent, but is also resorted to with the chief tradesmen, being in fact a sort of inverted form of thrift, though a heavier price has naturally to be paid for commodities obtained. The majority of landlords in what is not by any means an easy position show no small forbearance. Often they are between two fires, being accused of cruelty where they summarily eject for small arrears and blamed if they allow them to accumulate; but the majority of them succeed fairly

well in getting rid of bad tenants whilst trusting those who show themselves willing to pay their debts. Often the chronic nature of distress from want of employment is well exhibited in the case papers of relieving authorities, the rent owed from year to year—in recurring cases—often varying very little; and the debt rises up to a point, then it falls and is paid off and then rises again.

A frequent resource, but one that is never a sign of thrift and not seldom one of thriftlessness, is the earnings of wives and children. It is used chiefly by the lower class of men; for the skilled artisan, in more recent years at any rate, has taken a pride in putting his wife and children above the need of this and in bringing the latter up in a better way and to some better trade than he was himself. The better class, therefore, shrink from this resource, and make use of it only under pressure of necessity. But with the inferior artisan, and with a good many labourers, no compunction is felt to allowing their wives to work and at putting their children—boys especially—to trades that are highly paid at an earlier age. With the more thrifty some regard is had to the future welfare of the lads, but the less thrifty the head of the house the more is every penny obtained that the lad can earn at the earliest age, and this does as much as anything to lead to the growth of casually trained lads, often without any trade, who at 20 are already beginning to fill the ranks of the unemployed. The proportion of the applicants for relief under 25 years of age is not small and it is growing. The evil is greater in the building trade because its less skilled and less protected ranks are filled with the sons of such fathers

who are employed in many other trades besides that of building.

Another question of importance arises from the possibility or otherwise of obtaining alternative employments, whether it be by a permanent change from a dying trade to another to meet a permanent reduction in the demand for labour, or whether it be simply to tide over the stress of periods of temporary unemployment. The former is a question of no little importance at the present time owing to the changes that are producing congestion in certain branches of the trade. Apart from what we may hope will be the temporary over-supply caused by past prosperity, though even this will be more quickly counteracted by the possibility of leaving and entering trades that are less overcrowded, the great question is, whether those who are permanently displaced by changes of method, material, and process—the carpenters by ferro-concrete, the plumbers and gasfitters by electricity and manufactured sanitary ware—can find employment in different trades than their own? Two dangers have to be met. One is that of a new kind of work belonging to a particular branch and naturally done by it but, owing to peculiarities in it, being done by men specially introduced for the purpose into the trade or district. The question here, therefore, is how to enable the men engaged in the trade to keep the work and to fit themselves to master the new developements. The second danger is that caused by changes reducing the demand for labour in a process, whether or not the work is actually transferred to different men. The use of machinery may simply cause it to be carried out more quickly and with less

labour without increasing the demand elsewhere. On the other hand, the change may cause much that is the work of one class to be done by another, for instance, carpenters' work by concreters; and in these cases it is important to know how far the old hands can learn the new processes or enter any cognate trades where the demand for labour is greater.

Changes within a process are continually occurring, and often on a very small scale, as each trade develops. Sometimes they will take place so gradually that the workers almost insensibly pick them up as they go along. More often some displacement takes place especially among the older men who find it difficult to alter the habits and methods of a lifetime. Sometimes, however, wide variations, such as new methods introduced from abroad, mean the danger of a greater displacement. An instance of this in recent years is that of the plaster-work introduced from Italy and at first at any rate carried out by Italians who taught the process to the English workers. Fears were at once expressed that the English plasterers would suffer, but fortunately they possessed capable leaders and met the change in time to learn the new process and so keep the vast majority of the work in their own hands.

More important are the changes that permanently transfer work from one set of workers to another, not only because of their frequency at the present time, but because they mean a wide and definite change from one process to another, and not the minor one in ways and means of carrying out a particular one. Not only is this a more difficult and dangerous undertaking for individuals, but it raises all sorts of questions as to the

right of entering a trade and the means of learning it. Most important of all, however, is the question of the standard of living. For the tendency of such changes is often from a process where wages are high and manual skill great to others where improved methods and machinery render less of the latter requisite. The change, therefore, from the workman's point of view, is too often from a higher to a lower class and from better to worse pay. Sometimes the substitution is from artisans' work to that of unskilled labourers, at others from one form of skilled labour to another, but to a less skilled and less well paid class. Thus in the building trade there is a great obstacle in the way of carpenters with wages at 10½d. an hour and a proportionate standard entering the concrete process where both the skill and the pay are much less. Similarly, plumbers who earn 11d. an hour are unwilling to transfer themselves to electrical work where the rates are only 9d. A further difficulty is the jealousy often felt by men of one trade at the entrance into it of men engaged in another, and the obstacles that are thrown in the way of allowing one process to be learnt by men belonging to another, whilst under the most favourable circumstances the transference will take time. Again, when such a change is not from an old to a new process, but to an entirely different one, though perhaps in a cognate trade, the difficulty is all the greater. For in these cases it needs a general knowledge of the market, a clear inspiration as to which are the prosperous trades, and a quickness in learning the new work that men in general, and still more those likely to be affected, do not often possess.

Be that as it may, the effect of all sorts of changes of this kind will be in inverse proportion to the adaptability displayed by the men themselves; and whilst all changes can at best be met but slowly, such adaptability is necessary if they are to be carried out with a minimum of distress. Unfortunately the general opinion seems to be that men in the building trade have been slow to adapt themselves when the need has been greatest and apparently are not always up to date. Sometimes their resistance to change is unreasonably prolonged, and so they lose sight altogether of the best available means of escape. A leading member of a carpenters' union told me that he feared the men had not shown the ability they should to meet the change of conditions brought about by ferro-concrete and machinery. The plumbers have been still more remarkable for the ultra-conservatism of their attitude, though in marked contrast to this was the promptitude with which the plasterers mastered the new processes and retained their market. If, therefore, sufficient consideration has not always been shown to the men, their own attitude is too often detrimental to themselves, whilst it increases the difficulty of dealing with such changes.

Importance also attaches to the possibilities that are open to the men of obtaining, for the time being, some alternative employment to tide them over those periods when they are unable temporarily to find any in their own trade; and it is desirable to know what are the facilities for getting work elsewhere, or as it is sometimes called "black-legging," when none is available in the building line. For the members of the skilled branches

direct openings of this sort are few, and unskilled labour often has far more chances, since much of it, being general labour, is equally at home in any sort of unskilled work. The artisan being more specialised than the labourer, and having a higher standard of living, and, above all, by the danger of injuring his mechanical aptitudes by hard manual work, has very little outlet in those open trades where the work to be done is of the heavy but unskilled type, whilst he possesses few means of getting odd work in other skilled trades. The labourer, on the other hand, has many more openings, especially at the waterside, though the organisation of labour since the dock strike has reduced the amount of such casual work obtainable, and many odd jobs can be obtained as carmen, since most men can drive—more or less. Other odd work is also available, and the Christmas rush provides employment for many for a few weeks at the worst period of the winter slackness, and where the busy season in one trade corresponds with a slack one in building, openings in the less-skilled branches can occasionally be found. But as in building itself, the search for such work is often purely casual; and an organisation that will definitely provide men for the busy season of one trade where those are thrown out by slackness in another is needed; and in all these alternative employments it is doubtful if the best use is made of the casual jobs casually found that too many of them become.

The possibilities of averting or mitigating distress that have been discussed in this chapter have an important bearing on the questions at issue, since much can be done by these means, and much also ought to be

done that is not, the rates paid even in the unskilled trades being above the average even of other fluctuating trades, and very much above that of the non-fluctuating ones. Moreover, even if provision of this sort is more difficult than that for sickness or accident, yet much can nevertheless be done. We cannot, indeed, regard thrift, prudence, and adaptability as a panacea for, or their absence as the cause of, all ills; but a due and reasonable provision for the more calculable variations in employment is not only actually made by many of the men, but it is a duty and a necessity, since any collective provision for what is beyond the power of the individual presupposes provision by him of what it is in his power to provide. Individual adaptability to circumstances will avail in part but not entirely, and the chief difficulty results from unexpected or unduly prolonged periods of want of work, when none but the men with the largest reserves, who are perhaps the least likely to be long out of work, can be expected to tide over them; and the thriftless and those who cannot or will not save, but who live up to the full extent of their wages when in work, are likely to be longest unemployed. Thrift, however, can always or even often prevail where distress is most severe, and whether means can be taken to avert such occasions or to provide means for helping the workmen over them will need to be considered; but before this the work of the trades unions must be commented on.

XI

THE TRADE UNIONS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

THE position occupied by trades organisations towards the problems of unemployment is sufficiently important to receive separate treatment. They contribute towards the solution of the question not only by the direct payment of benefit during periods of want of work, but also in greater or less degree by the work they do or can do towards the organisation of labour. In the first place, as the only species of society which does and practically the only one which can make such payments, their scope and power is of the utmost importance in considering the means available for meeting lack of employment; whilst, in the second case, consideration of what is and what is not done towards the organisation of labour, and why, how much can be done, and why it is impossible to do more, throws much light on most of the problems before us. Generally speaking, the power of these bodies to perform these duties will be in proportion to their general strength and organisation, and this, therefore, may first be considered.

In most of the building trades the London unions are affiliated to the great national societies, the London district covering a twelve-mile radius from Charing Cross. The bricklayers, stonemasons, plasterers, and plumbers are all now included in such national bodies

and have but a single union in London, for the United Operative Bricklayers, the only other national body in England that is connected with these trades, has apparently no branches there and has its headquarters at Manchester. The carpenters, however, have three competing bodies in London, the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners, the Associated Carpenters and Joiners, and the General Union, of which the first is incomparably the most powerful, though it has only existed since 1860. The painters, too, have several different unions, the strongest of which is the National Amalgamated Operative House and Ship Painters with some 16,500 members in all and from about 2000 to 3000 in London. This section was in a far worse condition a few years back—witnesses before the Labour Commission complaining of their weak and disorganised state, owing to the existence of a large number of petty bodies which would not combine. The amalgamation of most of these up to and during 1903 with the above national society—itself originally a combination of various smaller bodies in the north—has much improved their position, but it is still far from powerful, union painters in London being only a small percentage of those engaged in the trade. Finally, the building trade labourers' unions are three in number and occupy an equally unfavourable position in every way. The London Master Builders' Association is a body comprising most of the best and largest employers of labour in the district.

The power and influence of the London unions is in general curiously varied, as strong in some respects as it is weak in others. Widely varying opinions are put

forward as to their real strength; and the London employers generally recognise their power, but the unionists themselves often find their efforts thwarted by the large proportion of non-unionists. It is in respect to wages and hours of labour that their influence would appear to be greatest; and it is remarkable how constant has been the increase of wages in London. For a rate of wages once obtained has always been firmly upheld until increased. Thus for most sections of the trade the rate was fixed at 9d. in 1872, and whilst most other districts suffered a fall of wages after 1878 from which they only gradually recovered, London wages remained at 9d. till they were raised in 1892.¹ Since then, thanks partly to the action of the London Building Trades' Federation, there have been three further rises, the last of them in 1901; and at the present day the rate for bricklayers, carpenters and joiners, and masons stands at 10½d., and that of plasterers and plumbers at 11d. They have also been able to enforce the standard rates on all employers of any standing whether affiliated to the Masters' Association or not, all good firms paying union rates whether in the Employers' Association or not; and all big provincial firms taking London contracts are compelled to pay them. "Always union wages paid," said a member of the Association; and the general opinion is that the unions are too strong for it to be otherwise, except in the case of the small jerry-builder. The one exception is the painters'. "This union," I was told, "is the great difficulty in our trade. The painters are a whole trade by themselves of all sorts

¹ Plumbers' wages had in the interval risen to 10d., those in the other skilled branches remained as in 1872.

and of varying grades. The Masters' Association will not recognise the Painters' Union." Ranging as they do from the most highly skilled decorator to the all-but-unskilled brush hand, the difficulty of a standard rate is bound to be felt, and the success of this union has therefore been less than that of some others. It has, perhaps, had most success with the West End furnishing and decorating firms, many of its men belonging to the most skilled sections of that trade.

But whilst very successful in enforcing a high standard rate, the unions have achieved far less in their dealings with the non-unionists. The reason for this is not far to seek. In regard to wage questions they have often received the support, tacit if not active, of non-society men, and so the whole of the workmen—except that somewhat inferior class supplying the small jerry-builders and the sweating shops—are at such times practically united. The employers, therefore, would be faced, if any possible encroachment were attempted, by the united resistance of nearly all those from whom their supply of labour is drawn. But when it comes to the question of employment of non-unionists, the members of the union have to face not only the employers but in most branches a majority of the men employed in the trade. There are some purely union shops where few who are not members ever get employment; but the policy, carried out with success in other trades and in other places, of compelling men to join the union as a condition of obtaining employment and of forcing masters to employ none but union men is only possible to a very limited extent. The one union that has even approached this position is that of the Stonemasons',

where the union men when in a majority refuse to work with non-unionists.¹ A member of the society—who had, against his will, been compelled to join—told me that all the men were practically forced to do so, many shops having their own stewards who are able to compel every man employed to produce his ticket of membership, and either to join or to leave, being able to procure his dismissal by the threat of calling out the men. In obtaining this position in most of the best shops the stonemasons have been helped by their position, possessing nearly the strongest organisation in the London district by including the larger proportion of the men. A comparatively small body of men, numbering only 5003 masons and 1079 labourers in the census of 1900, and being mostly engaged on fairly large work, they are less scattered than the men of most of the other unions, and organisation is therefore easier and more effective. No others have found it possible to follow their example in this respect, the general rule, more or less accepted on all hands, being now the payment of union rates with no questions asked. In some shops where there is a large preponderance of union men vacancies are generally filled up from the local branches and non-members have little chance of being taken on, and a strong unionist foreman will often by such means make his shop a purely union one. But more often both employers and foremen take a purely non-committal attitude, taking on and discharging men on purely business grounds, and many of the latter feel bound to take nothing but general industrial character into account. The position,

¹ See answer sent by the Kensington, Hammersmith, and neighbouring branches to Labour Commission to a question on this point.

indeed, is clearly recognised on both sides—the Stonemasons' Union being the possible exception—of allowing a free choice of men conditionally on payment of accepted rates. That there is much and often justifiable ill-feeling on the part of the unionists and that the position is accepted more or less under protest is true, since they know that on such questions they are certain to be checkmated by the coalition of the majority of non-unionists with the masters. The latter themselves maintain most strongly the principle of the freedom of a man to join or not to join as he pleases, though one of them told me he thought that whilst "no man or master ought to be compelled to join the union or Employers' Association, all ought to do so." More usually the freedom of men to do as they like and of masters to employ whom they like is unconditionally insisted on.

The comparative merit of unionist and non-unionist is now as always a matter in dispute, and opinions both among men, foremen, and masters are divided. More than one non-unionist workman gave me, as a reason for not joining, the characters of so many unionists. One said they were "a lot of drunken boozers," and another said that there were "so many bad eggs among them." Evidence of a similar character was given before the Labour Commission by Mr. F. A. Moore in describing what he called the "public-house element." On the other hand, it is maintained by trades unionists "the unions are very particular as to the competency of their new members. . . . There is more discussion in the branches about the admission of new members than about almost anything. In most unions there is a great deal of jealousy towards new-comers;" and the same

view was upheld before the Labour Commission. But though this policy is always steadily and persistently upheld by the central authorities, it is doubtful if the branches are always equally alert. In some cases, no doubt, the desire to extend membership and increase subscriptions may lead to the acceptance of members without too close a scrutiny, whilst in each branch there would be the local trade union set whose connections would always be accepted by the unions more or less as a matter of course. So far as one can judge, it is impossible to deny the steadiness and sobriety of a great majority of unionists, but the existence of a good many "bad eggs" seems equally indisputable; in the words of the witness already quoted, "I know many admirable men among them—staunch unionists; but, on the other hand, I know many loungers, hangers-on, and men more or less given to drink."

Similar diversity of opinion prevails as regards the capacity of unionist and non-unionist. One master in what was practically a union shop maintained that the non-unionists were seldom of any use though there were exceptions, but naturally the conditions that existed deterred non-unionists from applying, and the best men among them would probably avoid it. On the other hand, a foreman of one of the best and largest firms in London, speaking of an experience of fifteen years, said he found non-unionist men just as good as union men if not better: "There is nothing to choose between them; the non-unionists are less independent and less cheeky and just as good workers." The same was maintained before the Labour Commission by, among others, Mr. F. A. Moore and Mr. Stanley Bird—the latter speaking

on behalf of the London Master Builders. "Our experience," said the latter, "is that non-unionists are as good as unionists. There are as good and respectable non-unionists as there are unionists. Among the carpenters in London there are some 3000 unionists to 42,000 non-unionists, and the statement as ordinarily put is a calumny on the latter." Later, in answer to a question whether in the best shops the best men did not get considerably more, he replied that those who did were "probably all non-unionists." The unionists, however, maintained the contrary, that, though there were good non-unionists, the bulk of the steady good men, and including the best men of all, were in their own ranks.

That the unions do not possess the general and considerable superiority sometimes claimed for them seems obvious, since if they did they would inevitably hold a far stronger position than they do; and, secondly, though Mr. Bird's figures, even for the time he spoke of, seem to stand in need of correction, yet there is still a vast majority of non-unionists over unionists in the London district, and in 1893 an outside observer like Mr. Aves gave in *Life and Labour of the People* 11,000 trades union carpenters out of over 35,000 in the census area, whilst in 1901 the stonemasons in the whole London district numbered 2446, and the total for the census area only was just 5000, and the number of carpenters returned to the Labour Department of the Board of Trade averaged only some 12,000 in 1900; whilst, thirdly, as a matter of pure ungarnished fact, there is a large number of non-unionist workmen of the very best class whatever their actual

proportion to the total. One reservation must be made however, namely, that the class of casually employed, chronically unemployed, workmen who are hanging on to the fringe of the trade are mostly non-unionists, whilst the inferior class of men working for inferior wages for jerry-builders and in sweating shops are necessarily so. But even making allowance for this, there remain plenty of steady competent workmen who are not members, as well as not a few who are in the very highest rank. Each section has its bad eggs just as each has its main body of steady workmen, and between these latter appears to be no very obvious difference in quality.

Various reasons for this refusal of a large body of men to join the union can be given. In the first place, there is the unwillingness of some of the best of them to pay subscriptions for problematical benefits. "A great many men," said Mr. Moore, speaking of non-unionist carpenters, "do not care to give 1s. a week continuously for problematical benefits. They hardly care to keep up subscriptions as they do not think they derive corresponding advantages." The best men, he said, could always get work and that without the help of the unions, and most of the other benefits, those paid during sickness or accident for instance, could always be obtained through one of the various friendly societies. There is a feeling abroad among the best men, moreover, whether it be right or wrong, that as regards wages they are as likely to be hindered as helped by the societies. They fear, with or without reason, that the aim of the unions is to level down all wages to a single standard rate and that, therefore, they will hinder them from so improving their own position by means of their own

abilities. Another class of workmen there is, deeply and perhaps justly execrated, men often of inferior abilities who will not raise a finger nor pay a penny to help the unions, but "working alongside the unionists, draw much better rates, thanks to them, and fill their places during a strike, laughing at them up their sleeves." Many men of a certain type, moreover, either join the union for a short time and then leave it or cannot be induced to join it at all, because, possessing little or no foresight, they will not be induced to part with money except for an immediate return. For apart altogether from men working and living casually, being the despair of all trade organisations and all relieving agencies, there are many more over whom the societies have little hold, and who very soon leave them if they do not get something for their money at once. With the addition of those who disapprove of the principles and practice of trades unions and those who from old age or infirmity are past joining, the total of those who form the non-unionist majority is complete.

This weakness of the trades unions in numbers and in their hold over many of the men militates against the effectiveness with which they can grapple with the problems of unemployment, and especially with those preventive measures which can be brought about by a thorough organisation of the labour market. The scope of the curative measures adopted by them is also narrowed by the restriction of their numbers and consequent restriction of their resources. As regards the latter, however, it must be remembered that if they lose many whose payments would be regular, they also are spared the burden of many who would be a constant

drain upon their resources, so that the absence of some of the more solvent workmen is balanced, or more than balanced, by that of as many or more of the chronically distressed. As things are, however, their unemployed benefits are only open to a fraction of the men affected; and only a portion of those who are irregularly employed can make this provision. Many, indeed, of the more casual class have neither the resources nor the thrift necessary for membership, but many others who might benefit are also found to be outside their ranks. The unions are, moreover, practically the only direct means, in England at any rate, of making provision for such periods. They alone possess the opportunities of finding out with sufficient certainty whether or not a man is really unemployed. Other societies are checked, if not prevented at the outset, by the danger of fraud, since it is only in a body composed largely of a man's fellow workmen and knowing the local condition of affairs that this knowledge is obtainable. A composite body made up of all sorts of trades would have few means of defence against fraud and would be continually victimised by unscrupulous men, and this is probably the chief and certainly a sufficient reason for the refusal of the friendly societies to take up the work; whilst nothing similar to the national insurance against want of work that has been tried in Germany has been attempted in this country. The only other associations, indeed, that do anything of this sort are, as mentioned in the last chapter, the little "hard-up clubs" as they are called that are privately formed among bodies of friends and fellow workmen. An interesting point about the financial rules of the building trades unions is the little

modification they have undergone in recent years. The Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners have practically possessed their present form since 1866, the Bricklayers' rules were completed early in the 'eighties and have scarcely been altered since; the rate of contributions to the Plumbers' Union was slightly raised about 1890, and except for a slight reduction in the rate of sick pay there have been practically no alterations in the benefits since 1870. In the Stonemasons' the sick benefit, which had become insolvent, was closed about 1895, the rate of contribution for other benefits being raised from 6½d. to 7d.¹ Since 1891 dispute and travelling benefits have been slightly increased and superannuation benefit modified but on the whole extended. The Plasterers' have increased their contributions by 1d. since 1891, and made superannuation benefit continuous instead of limited to two years. The most important change, however, is that in the House and Ship Painters' who have since 1899 raised their unemployed benefits from 7s. for eight weeks to 10s. for ten weeks in certain months.

With the exception of tool benefit that is paid by the Carpenters and Joiners' Union, the chief benefits paid by nearly all the bigger societies are unemployed or travelling benefit, trade or dispute benefit, and the more purely friendly society payments for sickness, superannuation, and old age. The labourers' unions, with one exception, are practically trade societies, giving in addition to dispute benefit only funeral benefit, and a weekly payment during accidents, but not in sickness. The one union excepted — the Navvies, Bricklayers'

¹ The previous rate was 6½d. without and 10½d. including sick benefit.

Labourers, and General Labourers' Union—has a subscription ranging from 4d. to 6d. as against 2d. or 3d. in the General Labourers' Amalgamated and United Builders' Labourers' Union, and, in addition to the other benefits mentioned, pays also superannuation and a modified form of unemployed benefit, and to a certain section of its members sick and accident benefit. By all the chief artisan societies, however, all these benefits are paid,¹ and it is noteworthy how large a part the purely friendly society benefits have played in the operation of these trade unions, and the sick benefits of many of them are often among the best in the kingdom. In the summaries attached to the statistical tables of individual societies in the earlier yearly reports on trades unions it was remarked of the Operative Bricklayers' that, "The column—trades' privileges—covering all strictly trade union outlay shows how comparatively slight is the proportion of strike expenditure to the total cost of benefits. In 1879 the former averaged 4d. per head per member and the sick benefit 9s. 11½d. per head, the year being a bad one for the former and an average one for the latter benefit." Nearly all the bigger unions attempt to give an ample sick benefit, the usual rate being about 15s. to 10s. for the first three months, gradually decreasing to 3s. or 4s. a week; but in many cases continuing at this rate to the conclusion of the illness. In the report just quoted is an interesting comparison of the sick and unemployed benefits of the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners' with those of its parent society, the Amalgamated Engineers', showing

¹ Only the three Carpenters' unions and the National Amalgamated Society of House and Ship Painters pay unemployed, all the other chief unions paying travelling benefit.

that whilst the latter had an unemployed benefit on a somewhat heavier scale continuing till the close of the period of unemployment, that of the former, in addition to a lower scale of payment, was limited to a period of twenty-four weeks. On the other hand, in the case of sick benefits the scale was the same and the payments limited in time in the case of the Engineers, but continued at the rate of 6s. a week to the end of the illness in the case of the Carpenters and Joiners'. What makes the comparison the more enlightening is that the unemployed benefit of this society is by far the best and the sick benefit only slightly the best in the building trade unions. Good provision of accident, bonuses, and funeral benefits has been made, at any rate in recent years; and the superannuation benefits, many of which have recently been consolidated and some slightly increased, are equally efficient. Further reference will have to be made to this latter benefit later on.

The direct payment of unemployed benefit is confined to the Carpenters and Joiners' Union, and the Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators', and was apparently paid in 1893¹ by individual branches of the Plumbers' Society, all it seems being outside London, but this society exempts its members from contributions when out of work. Among the carpenters' unions the payments are 10s. for twelve weeks, 6s. for a further twelve, in the Amalgamated Society, and 10s. for thirteen and eight weeks respectively in the Associated Society and the General Union. The House and Ship Painters', on the other hand, have a system that is specially adapted to the seasonal nature of their trade.

¹ *Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed.* [1893.]

Formerly, 7s. a week for eight weeks and now 10s. a week for ten weeks is paid but can only be claimed during the four winter months (from November 1 to February 28), no benefit being paid during the rest of the year. The Associated Society of House Painters and Decorators, which was amalgamated in 1902 with the House and Ship Painters', formerly had various local unemployed funds, but no general fund. The other societies, bricklayers, masons, plasterers, and plumbers have only travelling benefit, and with one limited exception the labourers' societies have not even that. Travelling benefits usually consist of about 1s. 6d. per diem for those tramping in search of work, and with a few exceptions only one day's pay can be drawn at any lodge, but they do not form a very effective substitute for unemployed benefit. Moreover, even as far back as 1893, the Board of Trade publication, *Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed*, pointed out that among the stonemasons "this travelling in search of work has decreased of late years, members in the London district particularly preferring to wait for work to turn up." Actually referring only to the stonemasons, this is probably true of all the branches, and latterly the tendency has been a growing one. Commenting on the record amount paid in travelling benefit in the Operative Bricklayers' Society in 1904, Mr. Batchelor, the secretary,¹ said, "If anything is required to indicate the state of trade this would give it. Our men are not as a rule so migratory as they were; and the fact that so large a sum was paid during 1904 shows the position of many who had to leave their

¹ Annual Report of 1904.

homes in order to obtain the employment they failed to secure in their neighbourhood." It may be remarked, however, that this record payment only amounted to something less than 11d. per member; whilst during the same year the membership of the society was reduced by over 2000 men, from 37,821 to 35,488. Of such assistance as is derived from the travelling benefit only a small proportion is probably obtained by Londoners. "In our trade," I was told, "there are always a certain number of fellows tramping from place to place and to London owing to higher nominal wages;" and London hands do not seem to leave it, even at the worst of times, owing to the lower rates of wages prevailing elsewhere, so that they do not appear to obtain a proportional share even of what little benefit there is. Little or no effort towards the establishment of an unemployed benefit seems to have been made. Suggestions to this effect have been from time to time brought before the stonemasons, but with so little result that members did not trouble to give the information required of them. As the general secretary wrathfully remarked in 1890, "Only nine lodges have sent in returns or diary cards representing only 56 members mostly in constant work during the year. It is simply waste of time till members will pay more regard to our requirements and fill up diary forms." The attempt seems to have been dropped, and little effort apparently has since been made to establish such benefits among other societies, even when the very prosperous years of the later 'nineties gave the opportunity for a start.¹

Of the advantages conferred by the unemployed

¹ The raising of the rate of benefit among the painters is the exception.

benefits on the unions possessing them there can be little doubt. That of the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners' disbursed £90,814 in 1904, or rather more than 25s. 8d. per member among a total of 70,763 members, and in 1905 the amount reached just on £100,000, or not far short of 27s. 6d. a head in a membership of 68,177. The payments for travelling benefit per head in the same year were for the bricklayers 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per member, for the plasterers 1s. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d., and for the stonemasons 4s. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., but the unemployed and travelling benefit of the plumbers amounted to £8455 with a membership of 11,479 or 14s. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per member. It is probable, however, that some of the societies have, by means of a levy on those in work, released those less fortunate from payment of contribution whilst out of work. Among the many direct advantages given by such benefits there is little doubt that they have an important indirect effect on the numbers and stability of the various unions. Taking 1900 as the last year of good trade, following which came a steady decline, and comparing the figures with those published for 1904, the last year for which there are official figures, we find that whilst the carpenters show an increase of 5751 or about 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. and the plumbers of 293 or about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and the painters¹ of 443, with about the same percentage as the plumbers, the bricklayers in that period have decreased by 3342 (38,830 to 35,488), the plasterers from 11,009 to 8732, and the stonemasons have lost 3100 out of a membership of 19,419 in 1900. The unions without unemployed benefit are also far more sensitive to

¹ The figures of the two unions together, amalgamated in 1903, are taken.

changes in trade conditions than those possessing it, the numbers decreasing in the former with the first falling-off in employment, whilst in the latter there was but a slight decrease in 1904 on the figures of 1903; and we may contrast the 784 or 1 per cent. lost by the carpenters with the 6.6 per cent. (2333) lost by the bricklayers in the same year, of which "the continued depression of trade is undoubtedly the cause, and as this indicates the extreme poverty of the men who have left us it is all the more regrettable."¹ Similarly, after the disasters of 1877-1878 the carpenters and joiners weathered the storm far better, steadily increasing except for one year, whilst the plumbers fared next best. The bricklayers, then a small union, declined slightly, the plasterers still more, and the stonemasons very much.

The superannuation benefit already commented on has a not unimportant indirect influence in mitigating the hardships of unemployment, and often acts almost as a kind of subsidiary form of unemployed benefit. The difficulty of getting work in old age has always to be reckoned with and not less, probably rather more, in the building than in the average run of trades. Again, during a trade depression it is the least competent, whether from old age or other causes, who are first thrown out of employment; and in the last few years the force of this influence was intensified because previously employers had been hung up for lack of men to such an extent that a much larger proportion of older men were kept in full work, whilst in the depression that followed they were thrown out of employment and

¹ O.B.S. Annual Report, 1904. The figures in this paragraph are for the whole union.

large numbers came on superannuation funds. Acting as it does as a sort of unemployed fund for many of those whose age prevents them from getting regular work, this benefit does useful work in this way, besides providing information concerning the state of employment. The payments of most of the chief unions under this heading increased but slowly during the 'nineties, and the amount per head decreased considerably with the stonemasons, and very slightly with the bricklayers, and increased slowly with the plasterers, plumbers, and carpenters. In the four years from 1900 to 1904, however, the amounts have risen by a great deal, and the amount per head even more, and the figures for some recent years may be interesting.

	1890	1895	1900	1904
Stonemasons . . .	£4,495	£5,619	£5,916	£8,497
Plumbers . . .	300	383	782	1,208
Plasterers . . .	368	661	1,233	1,865
Bricklayers . . .	240	448	672	3,071
Carpenters . . .	5,499	10,966	18,605	30,015

Whilst the amounts per head of membership for the same years are:—

	1890		1895		1900		1904	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Stonemasons . . .	7	6	6	5½	6	1	10	5
Plumbers . . .	1	1½	0	11¼	1	4¾	2	2¼
Plasterers . . .	1	8¾	1	6¾	2	3	4	3¼
Bricklayers . . .	0	4½	0	4½	0	4¼	1	8¾
Carpenters . . .	3	6¾	4	11½	5	8¾	8	5½

Curiously enough the painters show much less variety in their figures, the increase since 1900 being much slower than in the other unions, a thing that is probably to be accounted for by the fact that in such a seasonal trade

there are bad months in the best and good ones in the worst years, with the result that the number of superannuated members on the books does not vary so much from year to year. The fairly ample provision that is made for old age does therefore help indirectly for a part of those who are suffering from unemployment; whilst this provision for a very deserving but often ill-placed class of members, whose misfortune is only their age, does something to relieve the congestion of the labour market in proportion to the number receiving benefit. The age limit is placed at 45 with the plumbers, 50 with the carpenters, and 60 with the other unions, the rates of pay being 8s. and 7s. according to length of membership in the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners', from 5s. upwards with masons, plumbers, and plasterers, and 4s. or 5s. with the bricklayers; and thus, though the amount and sufficiency of the payments vary, provision for old age is made by all the "skilled unions."

Apart from the purely curative functions of the trades unions, in enabling provision to be made by their members, there are other functions performed by them in their dealings with the labour market and in the assistance given to members in the search for work. Such functions have the widest scope and attain the maximum of utility in some of the great manufacturing towns in the north of England and in some of the unions of the engineering, iron, and shipbuilding trades. Amounting as it often does to a practical organisation of the supply of labour, the successful performance of this work requires among other things a control over a vast majority of the workers in the trade, and owing to

the large number of non-members the carrying-out of these functions in the London building trades unions becomes relatively ineffective. Containing as they do what is in almost every case a minority of the men in the trade, there is, in addition to the limitation of their sphere of usefulness to the ranks of their members, a positive hindrance to the performance of these duties at all even for their own members, and a great difficulty in adequately performing them.

That system of mutual assistance in getting jobs which a man and his mates render to one another is extended and carried out in a more systematic manner by means of the vacant books of the trades unions. Each man as he becomes unemployed writes his name in the vacant book at the local branch office or meeting place; and then every other member of the branch, and branches ordinarily number from 20 up to 400 or 500, is looking for a job for him, or, to be more exact, all members of the branch are on the look-out for vacancies to clear the vacant book. Obligations are imposed on all members to inform the branch secretary when men are wanted anywhere; and whilst in some unions—for instance, the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners—a small sum, generally 6d. per member, is given to any one who will take unemployed ones off the books, a heavy fine is imposed on any one known to be giving preference to non-union men. The usual thing is to inform the secretary where men are, or are likely to be, wanted, and the latter is bound to inform out-of-work members where best to look for jobs. Often a list of the principal yards and of the buildings in course of construction in the district is kept at the branch meeting

house for the benefit, more particularly, of members on travel, who are at once directed on by the secretary to the most likely places. In what are known as strong trade union shops with a union foreman, the news is at once carried to the branches and places practically filled by union men as soon as they occur. Moreover, at every lodge meeting it is customary for members to give information of vacancies occurring in their own shops or that they know to have occurred anywhere. A fortnightly or monthly publication gives the state of trade in various districts all over the kingdom. Thus, by these methods not only are members assisted to find work when out of employment, but others whose jobs are ending are enabled to find fresh places to go to at once without any delay between one job and another.

So far as the giving of mutual help by individuals and of assistance to them from the branches is concerned, much is already done, but the complete and systematic organisation of the market that in some other cases is carried out so fully is rendered practically impossible; and apart from self-help and promulgation of knowledge, the London building unions do, and can do, little. In the first place, a further use of the vacant book, much less common under present conditions, not from any unwillingness in the union, but from the reluctance of employers, is its adaption to the purposes of the employer in search for men, but in London only a very limited use is made of it for this purpose. Partly owing to the large amount even of skilled non-union labour that is available and partly owing to the general utilisation of the system of calling round in search of work and of taking on the first man who calls provided he is efficient,

little reliance seems to be placed on this use of the vacant book by masters or men. What was said of this subject in 1893¹ still holds good: "All branches keep a vacant book, but it is seldom used, members as a rule depending upon their own knowledge or upon information obtained at lodge meeting." The rule adopted where the facilities afforded by the vacant book are utilised, is to send the man whose name stands first in the book, though sometimes the secretary is empowered to use his own discretion and especially in any jobs that are at all out of the ordinary. If, however, a special man is asked for that man is sent, if unemployed; and probably many of the applications that are made are simply to obtain if possible the services of particular hands. Some of the stronger union shops make some use of the branch vacant books, but otherwise, except in the case just cited, or in that of a sudden demand, employers generally prefer to get their own men without recourse to the union. In some of the provincial branches apparently this method of obtaining men from the branches is far more common. By the Agreement at Oxford in 1894, Rule 13 provided for what the *Building Trade News*² described as "an improvement on tramping. Call books to be kept at various places, and the first signing to have first call, unless others are desired by employers or recognised foreman." After speaking of the difficulty of custom, it added, "but we certainly prefer the Oxford plan." Probably, however, the difficulty lies deeper than mere custom, as many employers object to limiting themselves to the use of

¹ *Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed.*

² Sept. 1894. Organ of the London Building Trade Federation.

union men which a thorough adoption of this system would imply. To carry it out successfully, it is necessary to enrol a large majority of the men in the union, or at any rate of those working in the best shops and in all in which union rules are observed; and the fact that only a part of the men belong to the societies renders the use of this plan extremely limited, and especially whilst the master builders can or think they can engage equally good men—union or non-union—without resort to the vacant book. Moreover, it is one of the chief duties of foremen to get in touch with a sufficiency of suitable hands, and the foremen of the larger builders especially have ample sources of their own, and with the present abundance of labour often have little or no need to apply to the branches. The smaller masters who are more likely to have difficulty in getting the labour they require are not infrequently suspicious of the union and are generally more glad to pick up what they can get from among the men who apply to them for work than to apply to the union. In fact the masters are far more likely to want men when there is a shortage of labourers not of labour, that is to say, only at those times when there is little or no need for the men to use the vacant book at all. As things are at present in the building trade a complete organisation of unemployed labour by this means seems far off, its effectiveness being in proportion to the numerical preponderance of the unionists. Some of the north-country unions carry out such duties most thoroughly, and the result of such systematic organisation is to reduce the number unemployed as near the minimum as conditions of trade will allow and checks the increase of surplus labour. There is much

done in some unions to find work for members even at distances of some hundreds of miles, but any complete organisation of surplus labour by means such as these is rendered impossible in the London building trade by the large proportion and frequent preponderance of non-union labour.

Possibly one reason why more use is not made of the union "vacant" books is that no guarantee of competence is given when men are sent, the unions pointing out that it is still in the masters' power to dismiss men who prove inefficient. It is sometimes suggested that some such guarantee should be given when men are sent, and some go even further and suggest that each unionist when on tramp for work should carry such a certificate of competence with him. Objections, however, are raised on both sides. Some trades unionists would gladly accept it if the employers would, but fears are expressed by some that it would lead to a boycott of unionists, whilst it is pointed out that under present conditions the masters would probably object to being tied down to the employment of unionists only. On being questioned as to a suggestion of this sort before the Labour Commission, Mr. Bridgeman stated that such a recommendation would be an inducement to try men, nothing more. Under present conditions, indeed, the adoption of such a plan is beset with great difficulty, and whilst the giving of a guarantee of competence is objected to where this does not carry with it a certainty of employment but only an inducement, the masters, on the other hand, are not likely to wish to confine themselves to one part of the men but prefer to make use of the whole market available. Here, again, the prevalence

of non-union men is the great drawback; and before the work of organising the labour market from within the trades unions, which is rendered all the more difficult by the vastness and complexity of London, can be fully carried out, it will be necessary to reduce non-unionism to that feeble minority, chiefly of inferior men, that it is in some other parts of the country.

XII

METHODS OF DEALING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT

THE difficulty of the question of dealing with unemployment is often concealed by the tendency to treat it as a single problem, whereas really there are many separate ones, each needing treatment and methods peculiar to itself, and the necessity of inquiring what are the general industrial and social conditions producing unemployment in each individual case is particularly neglected. Among other things this multiplicity of causes prevents the mere provision of work from being effective. For whilst work is often a good test of the *bonâ-fides* of an applicant for relief, and whilst it can tide a man over a period of shortage of work in his trade, and even save him from the worst effects of it, yet being at best but a palliative and not a cure for the causes of unemployment it cannot be relied upon to prevent a man from again suffering distress on the recurrence of any of them. Except, therefore, in individual cases, it is but a stopgap, and one that tends to increase by perpetuating the evil. As a remedy it has its times and occasions of usefulness, but to trust unconditionally to it as a remedy for unemployment is to look only at effects and ignore causes; and the effects will recur so long as the cause remains untouched.

Much light has been thrown on this subject by the

administration of the Unemployed Workman Act, when the cases of a large number of applicants were found unsuitable for the provision of a few weeks' relief work. Most of the more skilled and more deserving of the unemployed did not apply, and had they done so they would probably have increased the proportion of those unsuitable to such treatment. Those thrown out by trade changes and developments would only, at best, have been assisted to eke out the precarious livelihood left them by their own trade, but the permanent shortage produced by these changes in the demand for their labour would not have been affected. On the contrary, they might be thus tempted to continue to hang about an occupation that could no longer provide them a decent livelihood. To men suffering from long-period variations, provision of work may sometimes be more useful, namely, where there is a visible possibility of their regaining regular work within a definite period. These conditions are not often fulfilled, and the men who fulfil them, "the normally self-supporting workmen, temporarily out of work" of the Act, are the most difficult to discover and the most diffident of applying for help.

Most commonly the applicants belong to those sections of the trade which feed the casual labour market, and are for one reason or another chronically unemployed—those who have run wild as lads and grown up without training or trade, those who live by picking up odd jobs as builders' labourers or painters, those who in all but the best seasons lose time between job and job, and those who, winter after winter, are out of employment, in no worse and no better condition than in previous ones, being engaged in those kinds of work where

seasonal irregularities produce most casual labour, and, finally, those whose field is that of the very small masters who seldom have regular work to give but keep their men hanging on to them but only partly employed. The position of these workers is nearly always the result of a combination of some if not all of the causes enumerated, and they are often of the class that fails to make any provision during employment for periods of unemployment.¹ Further, there are many cases—less perhaps in the building trade than in some others—who have lost regular work through failure of firms or change in the headship, and, being unable to secure other permanent employment, have fallen into the ranks of casual labourers in the building trades. Indeed, quite a number of the more casual workers have been men who have originally possessed other trades but have by misfortune or misconduct fallen out of them, and have found building the most lucrative and in some of its branches the most accessible alternative. Men of this type sometimes obtain temporary benefit from a period of relief work; it “helps a little” they will themselves tell you, but from the nature of things it cannot often have any permanent effect. The casual worker remains casual still and the seasonal worker is as badly off as ever in the next winter, for the demand for labour does not become more regular and nothing is done to replace in other regular situations those who have fallen from them. Indeed such doles of work, besides sapping energy and industry, often replace rather than supple-

¹ So far as the above is concerned the reference is to those applicants only who can be classed as deserving of help, and therefore excludes those who are debarred by reason of general bad character or dismissal from employment for grave faults.

ment other casual jobs, and the influences that bring the majority of applicants to distress committees will, once they have brought them, bring them always, because their unemployment is due to faulty organisation of the labour market and other recurring causes, and these influences cannot be eradicated till such defects are cured. Provision of work, therefore, deals rather with effects than causes, and though it may have a sphere of its own, that sphere will be narrowed to certain special and definite occasions and will not as some suppose be applicable indiscriminately to every type and almost every individual case of unemployment. Before considering any possible remedies, it will be best, even at the risk of repetition, to recapitulate the various tendencies producing unemployment, stating briefly the needs of each and the lines upon which they can be met, and the treatment best suited to ward off the evil results that follow in their train.

One influence that helps to increase unemployment is found in the present unsatisfactory method of entering the trade; for, in addition to the greater difficulty of regulating the provincial influx into London, and its tendency to continue when a check should be put upon new entrants into the trade, we find two evils which directly affect London lads. One prevents those lads who do enter the trade from obtaining a complete training, causing them to be the first to be dismissed when bad times occur and the least able to get into the best shops where work is likely to be most regular. The other is that growing tendency for the lads, including some sons of artisans, to grow up unskilled and so flood the unskilled labour market, becoming casual workers

even in their early manhood. What is needed, therefore, is a system which will prevent both the growth of half-skilled labour in the skilled trades, and place the sons of Londoners on an equal footing in this respect with provincials, and enable some of the smarter and abler of those who would otherwise become unskilled workers to find places in the skilled ranks, so checking the over-supply of the former. Thus by improving the labour supply a check would be placed on this tendency to increase irregularity of work, and the sons of Londoners would be given a fair chance of work in their own market, whilst, being raised to an equality with provincial lads not given a monopoly, the best of the latter would not lose the chances of rising in the world that London affords them. The whole subject is a wide one, needing special investigation, for it extends far beyond the questions immediately connected with unemployment, but as far as the latter is concerned, a well-thought-out system of training is one of the things needed to cope with the evil of irregularity of work.

To deal fully with changes taking place within his trade, the individual needs, but too seldom possesses, a knowledge of the condition not only of his own but of kindred trades, and even some power of foreseeing future developments. Much is already done, both by individual effort and by the circulation of information by the various trade societies, to enable men to see at once what is actually happening, but more could and should be done in various ways, both by public bodies and by trade unions, to check the stream of men entering the trade more quickly and more effectively than at present, and to give the knowledge necessary to enable

men to leave a decaying trade and enter one where the demand for labour is on the increase—to do, under different conditions and on a somewhat wider scale, what has long been done as between district and district by the periodical reports of trade unions, which direct men from districts where employment is diminishing to those in which it is plentiful. In some trades, indeed, the aim of decreasing the supply of labour and rendering the whole of it more fluid is very largely achieved, though this is not carried so far in the building trades. Moreover, in addition to facilities for knowing and foreseeing changes in trade which could to a great extent be done through an increase of, and improvement in, labour statistics, some fuller provision is required to enable those displaced in one form of employment to transfer themselves to another where the demand for labour is on the increase. Too often such men hang on to their old work as casual hands, not only with no benefit to themselves, but endangering the position of the class just above them, or else they sink into the ranks of the unskilled, whilst at the same time the rising trades are filling their ranks from other sources until they in turn decay and are left with a similar reserve of their own. Labour possesses insufficient fluidity between craft and craft, and thus each industry largely depends on separate sources for its labour supply, because no sufficient means are available for transferring men from one occupation that is overstocked, and training them for a more or less cognate branch where demand is brisk. Labour at best cannot be completely fluid, but fuller opportunities for teaching “old dogs new tricks” seem feasible, though this would also require in the London

building trade a revision of its methods of industrial training. A more available policy is that of promulgating information, to guide men into the right channels, which could be partly accomplished by improving and enlarging the statistical duties of governmental departments.

Ordinary long-period variations are perhaps those where provision of work is most calculated to be useful, since during their course the ordinarily self-supporting, but temporarily unemployed, workmen are likely to be most numerous; since in proportion to the severity of the depression men further and further removed from the chronically under-employed begin to be affected. These are the men who are most likely to regain full and regular work so soon as conditions improve, though there is still the difficulty of correctly separating the men thus exceptionally unemployed from those who are only somewhat worse off than usual, and who must primarily be dealt with by regularising the employment and the demand for their labour. Fortunately there is an alternative to the ordinary method of providing relief work with its great inelasticity and with its limitation to a few unskilled forms of labouring work. Relief work pure and simple tends also to deter the best men from utilising it by the stigma that almost inevitably attaches to it; but the alternative policy of increasing the amount of work in the market in bad times has the very opposite effect, especially if the men are taken on and discharged by ordinary commercial methods. This policy, too, suggests the possibility, not only of diminishing the force of a depression, but of checking the corresponding inflations before they rise to undue

heights. For except where the latter result from causes that bring about a permanent increase in the trade, their "cyclical" character makes almost inevitable reactions, strictly proportional to the extent of the prosperity, and the greater the boom the greater is the resulting depression and *vice versa*. The building trades, indeed, experience, in addition to the influence of general trade movements, longer periods of their own during which trade remains steadily brisk or steadily depressed proportionately to what is happening in general trade; but between these long periods the law apparently holds good. Not only, therefore, will the increase in the demand for labour in bad years tend to limit the extent and force of the depression, but by checking it, and for other reasons, will result in the corresponding rise and also future depressions being less violent, whilst the equalisation over a series of years will cause the proportion of those who cannot get regular employment to be less and that of those who can to be greater.

The most obvious method by which this could be carried out is through the works of public bodies—governmental and municipal—which comprise a larger proportion of the work here than elsewhere. It has already been applied—by individual borough councils—to the case of seasonal variations, but its use for equalising fluctuations over a series of years has often been suggested, and the building trades would probably benefit more than any other. Much public work must be done as occasion arises and to suit public convenience, but other works can often be carried out or postponed for a few years without danger, and these latter, it has been proposed, should be thus manipulated according

to the general condition of the market, and, further, that public bodies should prepare plans of useful and beneficial works that though desirable are not necessary, these being kept in hand until times of bad trade and then being carried out. A danger affecting this suggestion, which the first escapes, is that the additional expense will increase the burden of public charges and so increase cost of production, handicap producers for the open market, and check employment in other directions, but work that must be carried out and paid for sooner or later is not open to this objection.¹ Such a policy consistently and continually carried out, whether by delaying work that could be delayed in good years or hurrying it on in bad ones, would have an automatic tendency to equalise the demand for labour, decreasing it when it is great, increasing it when it is falling off; and by equalising it would do something to check the fluctuations in demand. The success of the policy would depend largely on treating the work not as work for the unemployed, but on ordinary commercial lines. Men must be taken on and discharged solely according to their capacity as workmen, whilst anything in the nature of giving all applications in turn work for a short period of, say, a fortnight or so would be fatal. It is possible that the men actually taken on in such public contracts would be those usually regularly employed elsewhere, owing to the possible superior attractions of

¹ An interesting practical instance of this policy in Ireland was given by Mr. J. Macnamara, representing the Cork United Building Trades, before the Labour Commission:—"The union is chiefly engaged in agitating local authorities. Local work is often hung up for two or three years, so that in years of slackness we do our best to get the boards to take on work in contemplation as soon as possible and so provide work for our members. The policy is generally successful."

such jobs, but this is a matter of indifference, since the result would be an equal increase in the openings provided on other jobs. The important point is the general increase in the demand, the actual details of its supply being unimportant; and it is needless to add that wages and hours of labour would be the same as those of the open market. A possible advantage, moreover, from the point of view of the employer and the ratepayer would be the cheapening in the cost of the work, the price of building materials falling in slack years owing to the decreased demand. A further question is whether such work should be carried out by direct employment or by contract, which to Mr. Charles Booth in 1895 seemed a matter of indifference. The arguments for the latter appear to carry greater weight, since to check, if not the intensity, at least the duration of depressions a stimulus must be given to enterprise, which in times of depression could best be done by increasing the amount of work available for the general market. Similarly the argument would suggest an extension of direct employment in times of great prosperity because of its tendency to check undue speculation by employers. Limited, therefore, though the scope of such a policy may be, its tendency to equalise demand is important, and will probably do much to check fluctuations, especially if carried out in conjunction with an organisation of employment that will decrease the surplus of half-employed labour that at present exists.

It is further proposed, as a means of avoiding the worst evils of long depression, to adapt hours and wages to the temporary circumstances of the trade. The eight hour agitation has practically attained its object,

the average working out at about $48\frac{1}{2}$ hours a week for the whole year ; but the hopes founded on this have only been temporarily realised. Fuller and more regular employment was at first secured, partly because of the general prosperity of the time ; but in building the permanent absorption of the less well employed fringe into the ranks of regular workers proves impossible so long as the fluctuations continue. Prosperity called additional men into the trade, and the depression that has followed left it with a surplus in addition to the almost permanent fringe of casual labour. To remedy this it is proposed to apply the system already adopted in the case of summer and winter hours to periods of good and bad trade. Difficulties are likely to arise, especially in regard to bench room, but, nevertheless, a sliding scale of hours to suit the condition of trade and to share out the work among the men engaged has much to recommend it. To be permanently and systematically carried out, however, a strong organisation within the trade, both of masters and men, is needed, and the perfection of the machinery of joint boards is a necessary preliminary. Such an arrangement is usually one of the last conquests of trades unionism, and in London it has not yet reached such a point. But, if complete, such an organisation might arrange for a sliding scale to obviate the need of discharges in periods of slackness and possibly also to avoid bringing into the trade during prosperity more men than can find a permanent place in it. Some employers do voluntarily work short time in slackness, but it is its general enforcement that is needed but so far remains an ideal. Whether such an arrangement could be applied to wages as well as hours

probably depends on the same set of circumstances. The necessity of continuing to pay high wages when things are slack is a cause of complaint by the masters; but under present conditions the unions have little choice but to insist on the existing rate. With the necessary machinery, however, it might be possible, whilst safe-guarding the workman's standard of living, to raise and lower wages as the conditions changed, and help to stimulate production in slack periods by a decrease in cost. Moreover, the raising and lowering of wages, by tending to check extreme fluctuations, would help to equalise demand, and so have a steadying effect on the market. Whether such a policy could be made to work in practice is another matter, but a complete system of joint boards is probably the only means of giving it a trial; and under them it would be possible to ensure full and adequate discussion, whilst the experience of some other trades is favourable to a successful solution. A second difficulty that stands in the way of such a policy, at least as regards hours, is that large surplus of labour that supplies the needs of a casual system of employment. If, therefore, the trade contains more members than it can permanently employ, the reduction of the time worked can only result in keeping too many men in the trade; and, if so, the reduction of the supply of labour within reasonable limits must precede, or at least go hand in hand with, such a regulation of hours. The evil resulting from lack of organisation of the labour supply makes itself felt here as always, and constitutes the most vital point of all, because the most permanent of all evils, continuing whilst seasons change and cycles move.

Seasonal employment with its attendant evils will probably need treatment somewhat similar to that proposed for long-period variations. In some respects the difficulties are greater, but many think that fluctuations within the year are less marked than formerly. Such as they are, they are determined more by repairs, renewals, and decorations than by new construction, and, of the latter, more by small and speculative building than by large contracts. The private demand and the refusal of people to have workmen in their houses during the short, dark, winter days is responsible for much of the variation. Painters suffer most from such changes, in some summer months as well as in the winter ones, other branches, though similarly affected, not suffering to the same extent. The chief hope of betterment seems to lie in the equalisation of work throughout the year, though there is not a very large supply of jobs available for these purposes. It mostly consists of painting which is the branch chiefly affected, but there is a certain amount of repairing work that is done by the carpenters and some that belongs to the bricklayers. As regards the hours of labour provision is already made, the hours being fifty in summer and forty-four in winter, and further development is unlikely. Indeed, short winter hours already tend to check certain kinds of building operations, especially those of the small speculator, and to shorten them still further might only lead to a further decrease. A lower scale of winter wages is also occasionally suggested, but apparently has never yet been seriously discussed. More important, perhaps, is the possibility of organising alternative employments for seasonal workers.

Finally, we have to deal with a vast mass of casual and under-employed labour, brought into existence in the manner already discussed. Its effects, too, have been analysed, among others its tendency to accentuate certain causes of irregularity, and also its products—men casual in life as well as in work, and because casual often inefficient and nearly always thriftless, whilst in the present chapter its adverse influence in preventing the modification of existing conditions has several times appeared. For the unorganised supply of labour, perhaps the crying evil of the trade, is one that underlies all others and makes it more difficult to understand them. Until we have solved this problem we cannot know what proportion of the labour supply is necessary to the trade in normal times, and to get rid of the surplus and deal effectively with the other evils that exist we must know this.

Two methods of organising the labour supply seem to be possible. One, that done by the trades unions has already been discussed, many of the societies doing very good work in this way,¹ but in the London building trade their opportunities are at present limited. The other alternative is the provision of employment exchanges under public control so as to bring masters and men into touch with one another. Various experiments,

¹ Compare *Report on Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed*. [C. 7182, 1893.] Report says of the Steam Engine Makers' Society: "The general result of these mutual good offices, backed up by the aid of the society which does not hesitate to send a member three hundred miles if there is an opening for him, is that the union generally shows a much lower percentage of unemployed members than others in the same trade." The comparative figures given for 1865, 1879, and 1890, respectively, were for this union, 0.8, 10.1, and 0.67, and for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1.8, 13.3, and 1.6.

both voluntary and municipal, have in the past achieved varying success, but a wider scope has been given to the work in London by the establishment of a system of municipal labour exchanges (25 in all) under the Unemployed Workman Act, 1905. Their administration has been kept distinct, and quite rightly, from the ordinary relieving functions of the distress committees and the Central Body. The system is at present on its trial, and the proportion of places filled to applications received is comparatively small, especially in the overstocked building market, but even now some of the results attained are full of promise. One great difficulty at present is the attitude of the trades unions, who fear not unnaturally lest they should degenerate into institutions for cheap and blackleg labour. The unions are themselves, perhaps, the best and most natural agencies for the organisation of labour, but are hindered from doing it effectively in London by the very large proportion of non-unionist workmen. The position they take up is not unnatural, especially in view of a recent decision of the Local Government Board that the municipal exchanges cannot be limited in their operation to employers paying and men earning standard rates. They are, moreover, chiefly used by non-unionist labour, the members of unions usually preferring to rely upon their own organisations. It is, however, only fair to add that all due precautions consistent with these limitations are taken, men, for instance, always being informed in cases where other than standard rates are paid. Since, moreover, the experiment is still in its infancy, it is reasonable to expect that to a great extent these difficulties will solve themselves; and it should be

possible to come to a fair working arrangement and obtain trade unionist support in return for a fair share in the management of the institutions, whilst the co-operation of the masters, on whom the success of the scheme chiefly depends, will probably be greater as soon as the exchanges get to be better known.

Many advocates of the scheme hope that ultimately such a thorough organisation of the labour market will take place sufficient to ensure general regularity of employment. Even if this ideal cannot be entirely realised, much can be done that will help in many ways to remove different influences that tend to casualise the labour market; and many small improvements are possible, each individually doing a little, whilst together they will amount to a considerable change towards more regular conditions of labour. Losses sustained through failure and removal of firms or through death and change among foremen could often be avoided by this means, and men who in this and other ways lose regular work and come to exist upon casual jobs would thus be enabled to get back to other regular employment. Smaller jobs of a few days, now picked up haphazard, might be organised, and the misfortunes of men who, owing to the large number of firms, miss work quite close at hand, might be avoided. They would reduce the number of chances of casual work and so the growth of that reserve which has grown up in the past, helping to prevent the building trade from being swamped by "bad" labour. Further, they could do what is possible to render available for men unemployed in the trade the opportunities of work afforded in others that are more brisk, and also put them in the way of obtaining in

November and December much of the temporary employment made available by the Christmas rush.¹ The result would be a dovetailing of trades whose busy periods differ, so that they would have to some extent one common reserve and not one reserve each. The exchanges, too, could carry out this and such work on systematic principles, and give such jobs to regular men, whereas previously they used to fall to any casual applicants; and can be careful to keep as many men as possible in regular employ, sending them on from one post to another. Finally, the actual surplus labour will to some extent be found and measured, enabling means to be taken to place it in other trades or remove it by emigration. At present the difficulty of thus withdrawing casual labour from the market is that it is not a surplus but a partially necessary reserve that is taken away, and generally replaced by a further growth of casual labour. The effect of this on the individual is often good, on the market nil. This the labour exchange system will alter.

Leaving aside the grander but more distant ideals, the growth and development of such organisation will gradually increase the number of men in regular employment and proportionally diminish the openings for casual labour. An increase in regularity will tend to raise the standard of efficiency, which in its turn will lead to further regularity in those cases where the more or less of it varies with the ability and steadiness of the

¹ This was actually done last winter in the case of the labour required by the Post Office during the rush—lasting about five weeks—the extra posts being placed at the disposal of the Central Employment Exchange. In only a limited number of cases, unfortunately, can trades be thus dovetailed.

men employed. Masters especially will be encouraged by the further opportunities of getting and keeping good men to reorganise and regularise their work. Moreover, the influence of such a system will be even greater on future generations than it is on the present. Many of the older men will probably have become casualised beyond hope, will form the displaced surplus, and need other treatment, but whilst the younger men, not being so completely casualised nor for so long, will have better opportunities of getting regular work, future generations, even those who grow up unskilled, will be assisted to avoid casual labour altogether. The completing of this organisation will no doubt be the work of years, but employment will gradually get more regular, labour more fluid and efficient, and casualisation both in work and life less frequent. Above all, those who are so by choice will be found out, and either made to change their methods or see their share of work slowly transferred to those who are ready and willing to work regularly even if it be for a variety of masters.

Among other things the success of such an organisation will assist the carrying out of other methods for dealing with those evils, which the system under consideration would not directly affect. The difficulty of obtaining an efficient training in London, the resulting evils, and the need of reform in this direction have already been considered, and a thorough examination of the position of boy labour is required to discover how far it is possible to protect lads from being left in early manhood without a trade and with no opening but casual labour. To get rid of the surplus created by a general reorganisation a variety of expedients will have to be

utilised, but emigration will help to remove it, and will be getting rid of what is a real surplus, and will therefore have a greater if still only a temporary effect in relieving the congestion of the market. This work will, no doubt, be furthered by such expedients as farm colonies and afforestation; and once the organisation is obtained, the removal of the resulting surplus will be a far simpler matter.

Different measures will be required to cope with the other causes of unemployment. Permanent changes may be met, partly by this very organisation, partly by means for enabling men displaced in one trade to learn, and learn quickly, that which is replacing it or some other one, whilst improved official statistics might enable changes taking, or likely to take, place to be discovered and foreseen, thus helping those actually affected to make provision for the change in better time, and ensuring that the young should be more rapidly diverted from the falling into the rising trade. Equalisation of the supply of contracts from year to year or month to month will do much to check long-period and also seasonal fluctuations. The scope of this remedy is indeed limited in many directions, but as regards variations within the year an effective organisation of the general labour market may as explained do something to provide alternative employments during the less busy months. To deal effectively with the cyclical type of variation a complete organisation by means of joint boards of masters and men is required as the only available means of regulating hours and wages in accordance with the volume of trade. A sliding scale of hours is proposed by unionists, to be so adapted as to

occupy the whole normal supply of labour, whilst a similar scale of wages, rising and falling as trade prospers or the reverse, might do something to stimulate enterprise in lean years. Provided, indeed, care is taken to fix a minimum below which wages and earnings shall not fall, and so preserve the workman's standard of living, and provided, further, that the necessary machinery is sufficiently efficient to ensure a return to normal rates and hours in normal times, this remedy seems likely to be as just and as effective as any. But, for reasons already given, the necessary organisation seems likely to be long in coming and therefore the proposed remedy to be proportionately delayed. For as things are now, each side, and rightly in its own interests, holds fast to what it has got, so that existing wage rates tend to check enterprise in periods of depression, and unchanged hours assist towards the large numbers unemployed.

When all is said and done, however, much will have to be left to the individual workman. For probably there will always be some seasonal variations in the trade as well as those due to exceptional causes, such as very severe frost, nor are long-period variations likely to be altogether eliminated. Much that can be done and many of the proposed remedies will not so much prevent changes in the demand for labour as enable provision to be made for them, and will tend to stimulate rather than abolish individual provision, whilst giving more encouragement than at present to the thrifty worker. Especially is this true of such organisation as will tend to eliminate the more casual workers in favour of those more regularly employed, and thus substitute

for those with whom, as a class, thrift is non-existent others for whom it is more possible and likely to be more effective, yet none the less necessary. Even now wages in the building trades are above the average because of the general irregularity of employment, both as compensation and to enable provision to be made for it. But since irregularities are of the very nature of the trade, the reforms proposed can but mitigate their violence and reduce them to a minimum. They can render them more measurable and therefore within reach of individual foresight, but for that reason individual thrift remains equally necessary though of vastly greater scope and utility. Further, since higher wage rates are paid for this very purpose, such co-operation is due as a matter of right and justice on the part of the workman; whilst as a simple matter of fact the longest terms of unemployment as well as the severest distress falls not on those who will and do, but on those who will not, make provision. Neither collective effort, nor higher wages, nor individual action can be alone effective, but each complements the other. Much light has been thrown by recent measures, not on the building trade only but on all trades, and bad as the condition of the former is at present, the remedies possible begin to be seen in a clearer light; and thus there is hope that the future may never see a return to the almost unparalleled evils of the present.

APPENDICES

APPENDICES

A

STANDARD LONDON WAGES AND SUMMER HOURS IN THE CHIEF TRADES

From the *Eleventh Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom* (1905-6), pp. 38-45. [Cd. 3690,-1907.]
The rates are those recognised on July 1, 1907.

BUILDING TRADES

Bricklayers, masons, carpenters and joiners, 10½d. per hour; plasterers and plumbers, 11d. per hour; painters, 8½d. or 9d.¹ per hour; labourers, 7d.¹ per hour. Summer hours, exclusive of overtime, 50 per week in all trades.

ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING

Patternmakers, 44s. per week, 54 hours; ironfounders, 41s. to 43s. per week, and about 53 to 54 hours; engineers (fitters, turners, and smiths), 40s. a week and 54 hours; boilermakers and iron shipbuilders: platers, 45s. a week, both heavy (shop and yards) and light; riveters, 38s., both in shops and yards; hours in all cases 54 per week.

¹There is no rate mutually agreed on between the workmen and the Employers' Associations in these trades, but that given is believed to be paid to the bulk of the men, though 8d. per hour is paid to painters by a fair number of firms.

CABINET-MAKERS, ETC.

Cabinet-makers, wages 10d. or 10½d., hours 50; french polishers, wages 9d., hours 52½; upholsterers, wages 9d. to 1s. (varying in different districts), hours 52½ to 53.

BOOT AND SHOE OPERATIVES

Clickers, lasters (on time work), and finishers (on time work), 30s. per week; pressman, 25s. per week. Hours in all cases 54.

B

SOME CLASSIFICATIONS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

A. By MR. H. LLEWELLYN SMITH from the Board of Trade Report on Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed. [C. 7182,-1893.]

Classification of the Unemployed :—

- I. Those whose engagements are for short periods and who have terminated their last engagement and have not yet entered on another.
- II. Members of fluctuating trades getting a full share of the work afforded by them, but not for the moment able to obtain employment.
- III. Men who are economically superfluous because there is not enough work to go round.
[N.B. Work being not an absolute but a relative quantity.]
- IV. Those whom no one will employ.

Types of Unemployment, caused by :—

- A. Fluctuations due to change of season.
- B. Yearly fluctuations dependent on seasonal changes abroad.
- C. Regular fluctuations within the year.
- D. Cyclical fluctuations, *i.e.*, more or less regular fluctuations over a series of years.

- E. Irregular fluctuations due to fashion.
- F. Migrations of trades.
- G. Transformations and reorganisation of trades.

B. By MR. H. LLEWELLYN SMITH as given in evidence before the House of Commons Committee on Distress from Want of Employment. [Cd. 365,-1895.]

- 1. Seasonal differences due to changes in demand for labour or to the physical difficulty of carrying out work.
- 2. Cyclical fluctuations in demand.
- 3. Fluctuations due to irregular climatic causes.
- 4. Local fluctuations and migrations of industry.
- 5. Changes of process or of fashion.
- 6. The influence of trade disputes in allied trades.

C. By MR. CHARLES BOOTH as given in his evidence before the latter committee.

Classification of Unemployment :—

- A. According to the job, *e.g.*, leakages between job and job.
- B. According to the weather.
- C. According to the season.
- D. As a result of changes of fashion or of tariffs, or as the result of peace or war.
- E. According to the conditions of trade as when sluggishness follows activity.
- F. According to individual capacity.
[N.B. This is not an independent cause but rather decides which man shall be out.]

D. By MR. W. H. BEVERIDGE, Chairman of the Labour Exchange Committee of the Central (Unemployed) Body for London.

Due to—

1. Decay of trades and to changes of process, of organisation, and of locality.
2. Expansions and contractions of trade—
 - (a) Seasonal.
 - (b) Cyclical.
3. Disorganisation producing a constant margin of unemployment. Result—"A standing reserve always available, but only occasionally employed."

C

NUMBERS OF MALES at different ages employed in the London (Administrative County) Building Trades at the census of 1900.

TRADES	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 & over	TOTAL
Builders	19	274	436	1,498	1,774	1,677	1,163	451	7,292
Builders' labourers	32	666	1,037	2,296	2,442	1,687	765	205	9,130
Carpenters, joiners	224	3,610	4,153	6,495	6,632	5,904	4,162	1,754	32,934
Bricklayers	40	1,103	1,881	2,932	3,087	2,654	1,464	565	13,726
Bricklayers' labourers	23	845	2,085	3,572	2,924	1,798	750	205	12,202
Masons	35	472	568	958	1,097	1,074	621	178	5,003
Masons' labourers	0	74	162	293	224	187	112	27	1,079
Slaters, tilers	5	110	168	214	195	131	65	23	911
Plasterers	29	593	684	837	1,068	1,045	640	264	5,160
Plasterers' labourers	6	97	166	267	162	86	32	5	821
Paperhangers, whitewashers	13	233	320	714	639	413	176	61	2,569
Painters, decorators, glaziers	104	1,709	3,366	8,752	8,958	7,671	3,947	1,266	35,774
Plumbers	138	1,915	1,953	2,831	2,016	1,206	545	162	10,766
Gasfitters, locksmiths, etc.	35	562	709	1,518	1,261	852	475	168	5,580
Total (at each period of life)	704	12,263	17,688	33,177	32,479	26,385	14,917	5,334	142,947

PERCENTAGES OF UNEMPLOYMENT in the London Building Trades from month to month as shown by the figures supplied by the Trades Unions making returns:—

I.—Average of all returns made month by month from April, 1893, to April, 1902, inclusive.

MONTH	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902
January	—	6.0	8.9	2.2	1.8	1.2	1.0	1.3	5.1	4.1
February	—	5.5	9.7	2.1	1.5	1.4	0.6	1.7	4.9	3.3
March	—	5.0	5.6	1.8	1.0	1.1	0.8	1.5	4.0	2.9
April	1.9	4.3	3.2	1.4	1.0	1.0	0.7	1.2	3.3	3.7
May	2.2	4.5	2.1	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.7	1.4	4.3	—
June	3.0	5.6	2.3	2.2	1.9	1.0	0.8	1.9	3.7	—
July	3.4	4.7	2.3	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.6	2.1	3.8	—
August	2.0	2.8	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.3	2.0	—
September	2.3	3.8	0.8	1.2	1.2	0.8	0.5	1.6	2.7	—
October	3.6	4.9	1.7	1.7	1.0	0.9	0.9	2.8	3.0	—
November	4.6	4.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	0.8	0.7	3.7	3.5	—
December	6.6	5.6	2.1	2.2	1.9	1.3	0.8	3.8	4.0	—

L

II.—Table showing separate returns made month by month by the Carpenters and Joiners' and Plumbers' Unions, and published separately in recent years. The figures available extend from May, 1901, to December, 1907.

MONTH	1901		1902		1903		1904		1905		1906		1907	
	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.	C & J	Plu.
January .	—	—	4.4	7.6	6.8	13.3	8.0	11.6	10.3	10.9	11.5	15.2	10.3	11.4
February .	—	—	3.2	7.2	5.1	14.5	8.1	9.7	10.1	16.0	9.1	15.2	8.2	13.0
March .	—	—	2.4	5.6	4.3	12.8	7.1	9.1	8.1	14.6	7.8	16.3	5.5	12.8
April .	—	—	3.1	6.0	4.2	9.3	7.2	7.9	8.3	11.3	6.5	13.5	7.6	9.3
May .	4.8	8.7	2.6	10.1	3.7	8.6	7.1	9.3	8.3	14.2	8.2	13.7	8.9	12.5
June .	3.1	11.5	4.9	10.7	4.9	8.7	7.9	9.3	8.8	11.7	9.4	13.9	10.3	12.9
July .	3.3	8.6	5.2	11.3	4.3	6.7	6.7	11.4	7.9	11.1	7.8	14.3	9.7	14.4
August .	1.7	3.9	4.6	8.6	3.1	5.3	4.2	7.5	5.5	8.7	5.5	7.5	5.1	7.3
September	2.5	6.0	4.5	6.0	4.6	6.4	6.4	11.8	7.1	9.9	6.5	9.2	7.8	12.9
October .	2.8	5.8	4.8	7.2	6.9	9.8	8.5	13.0	8.8	13.2	9.0	12.2	10.6	14.9
November	3.5	7.3	6.8	12.1	7.2	12.2	10.3	12.9	10.2	14.6	8.2	11.9	13.4	18.1
December	4.2	6.6	6.9	10.7	3.0	10.6	11.3	13.6	10.0	14.2	9.8	12.5	13.5	14.9

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